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The Kings of the East

SYDNEY C. GRIER

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THE KINGS OF THE EAST

A Romance of the Near Future


BY

SYDNEY C. GRIER

AUTHOR OF

'LIKE ANOTHER HELEN,' 'A CROWNED QUEEN,'
ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN	1
II. FIRING THE FIRST SHOT	17
III. IN SILVER SLIPPERS	33
IV. A DISTURBING ELEMENT	46
V. THE CROWN MATRIMONIAL	62
VI. <i>DANAOS DONA FERENTES</i>	75
VII. BREAKING WITH THE PAST	92
VIII. "A KIND OF WILD JUSTICE"	110
IX. VERSIONS DIFFER	124
X. TAKING COUNSEL WITH BABES	136
XI. EASTWARD HO !	150
XII. THE CHURCH MILITANT AND ORTHODOX	163
XIII. A GROUND OF HOPE	177
XIV. NO PLACE OF REPENTANCE	191
XV. A FOOL'S ERRAND	207
XVI. THE HOUSE OF THE LADY ZENOBIA	222
XVII. FACE TO FACE	239

XVIII. THE PENALTY OF GREATNESS	252
XIX. THE BREAKING-POINT	267
XX. <i>REDINTEGRATIO AMORIS</i>	282
XXI. A NEW FACTOR	296
XXII. THE HISTORY OF AN EVENING	314
XXIII. MAN AND WIFE	329
XXIV. "THE BITTER CLOSE OF ALL"	345

THE KINGS OF THE EAST.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOVEMENT AND THE MAN.

IT was a brilliant afternoon in late spring, and Vindobona was taking its pleasure joyously out of doors, as is its wont. The many parks and gardens of the city were crowded with holiday-makers in every variety of national costume and speaking the tongues of all the earth, and in the boulevards of the Ringstrasse a well-dressed throng made the pavements almost impassable. There was not a vacant seat to be found at the rows of tables outside each café, where strange and wonderful liquids were being consumed in vast quantities, but with a deliberation that implied the possession of unlimited leisure. No one seemed to have anything to do but to walk and talk, salute his acquaintances and criticise the rest of the world, pause for a while to refresh the inner man and then saunter on again, and this was indeed the case. The true citizen of Vindobona always has time for holiday-making, whatever other duties he may neglect, and those who make a study of his weaknesses calculate confidently upon this amiable peculiarity. This saint's day afternoon, for instance, there were gathered, in a room on the second

floor of one of the palatial mansions in the Opera Ring, four men, whose meeting had been facilitated by the absorption of the populace in its pleasures. One by one they had made their way to the appointed spot, the private office of the great financier Israel Goldberg, and here, where a business-like severity strove with a certain barbaric splendour in the appointments, they had refreshed themselves with fruit sherbets and perfumed Eastern tobacco before turning their attention to the matter upon which they had come together. Some signing of papers and a good deal of low-toned conversation followed, until at last the host leaned back in his chair and threw down his pen.

"That is well over," he said, speaking in German. "The movement is on the verge of realisation; we only await the man."

"Just so," said the venerable Scythian Jew at his right hand; "we need our Moses."

"But where is he to be found in this age of doubt and depression?" asked a sallow-faced young man, with large vague wandering eyes.

The remaining person at the table snorted fiercely. "This is the age of limited liability," he said. "Our Moses will take the form of a syndicate."

"With the excellent Texelius as managing director?" asked the Chevalier Goldberg, with a sympathetic smile. "I think not, my dear friend."

"I rejoice to hear you say that, Israel," said the old Rabbi, whose susceptibilities had been much ruffled by the irreverent remark of Dr Texelius.

"No," said the Chevalier, "although we are business men and this is a business matter, we must return, I fear, to the old ways. Without the man to whom I hope to present you this afternoon, our movement would be like a ship without a captain. You, my good Texelius, bring us the help of science, in my young friend Rubenssohn we have the support

of literature, and our venerable Rabbi Schaul assures us of the blessing of orthodoxy, while I myself supply the not unnecessary item of money. But we must, besides all these, have brains."

Dr Texelius was understood to reply that no gathering which included himself could be considered deficient in that particular, whatever might be said of the rest of the company, but his host smiled with pitying gentleness.

"My good Texelius, we all admit that you are unapproachable in your own line. You have enabled all the half-educated people in Europe to gabble a parody of your philosophy with more than your own brutality of language, and have taught them new bad names to call their neighbours by. But when it is a matter of conducting diplomatic negotiations of the highest delicacy, something more is needed."

"I see no need of diplomacy," protested Dr Texelius. "We have the Grand Seignior's promise, and we hold the money-bags. The Land is ours, and we have only to keep it, which is an affair of the sword, not of the tongue."

"And surely," said young Rubenssohn, "it is the Gentiles who will sue for our favour, not we for theirs?"

"Israel will become at once the exemplar and the monitress of the world," said the Rabbi. "Her central position, separated from the nations and yet vitally connected with all of them, her theocratic government, and the purity of her family life, will make her not only the model state of the new century, but the natural arbitrator in international quarrels."

The Chevalier Goldberg smiled again, but less patiently. "My dear good friends," he said, "do you think the world and its inhabitants will all undergo a radical change because Israel has obtained permission from Czarigrad to re-colonise Palestine? I tell you that as soon as our scheme is known, it will become the butt for the malice and jealousy of the whole earth. The hostile nations will unite against us; our own friends will be swept into the vortex. To enable us to

surmount the crisis before us, we need a leader of such varied gifts and experiences as it would seem almost impossible to find combined in a single individual. In fact, there is only one man in Europe, perhaps in the world, who possesses them, and I expect him here in a few minutes."

"And who may this heaven-sent leader be?" sneered Dr Texelius.

"I see him now, coming round the corner of the Opera-house," pursued the Chevalier, who from his seat by the window could obtain a view through the openings of the sun-blind. "That is he—the short man with the light moustache."

"An Englishman, evidently," said Rubenssohn; "or he would not walk to keep an appointment when he might drive."

"Right, Herschel my son. He is an Englishman. But," and the Chevalier dropped the blind which he had partially drawn up, and turned away from the window and the sounds of voices, laughter, and crowding footfalls which it admitted, "he is also a true cosmopolitan. For over ten years he was a king in all but name, and might, had he cared to do it, have married a queen."

"What! You too have been taken captive by the Mortimer idea?" cried Dr Texelius. "Our Thracian friends can't find words to deplore his loss. To hear them one might indeed think him Moses and David rolled into one."

"Is your friend really the man who was Prime Minister of Thracia, and was overthrown by foreign intrigues the day that the young King attained his majority, Chevalier?" asked Rubenssohn eagerly. "He has always seemed to me a heroic figure in an unheroic age."

"What I want to know is, how much are you going to pay him?" vociferated Dr Texelius, while the Chevalier smiled rather drily. Before he could answer the question, a deferential servant at the door announced "His Excellency Count

Mortimer," and ushered in a grey-haired man, whose keen blue eyes appeared to take the measure of all the occupants of the room at a single glance.

"Ah, my frient! You hef arrifed, den?" cried the Chevalier in English. "Beholt us all awaitink your pleassure. Dis fenerable clerchymen iss our goot frient de Rabbi Schaul, and here iss de worlt-renowned scientist Dr Texelius. Dis younk men iss Herschel Rubenssohn, de Poet off de Ghetto, a redical in theory, but aristocret by nature."

The Chevalier laughed meaningly, for while the Rabbi had risen from his chair and bowed low at the introduction, not without a touch of the servility of manner natural to one who sees a probable and powerful enemy in every man of superior rank, Rubenssohn had half-risen and then resumed his seat, conscious of the critical eye of Dr Texelius, who acknowledged the stranger's entrance merely by a nod. Count Mortimer was accustomed to associate with kings and queens, and Dr Texelius was an austere Republican, hating an aristocrat, moreover, as an anomaly in nature—a specimen which would not allow itself to be weighed and measured and labelled by his philosophy. Aristocrats worshipped an absurd fetish called honour, some of the manifestations of which could by no means be reduced to the profit and loss denominator to which he referred all human actions, and for some reason or other these same misguided people regarded themselves as superior to him. It was evident, at least, that this one did, or what was the meaning of the scarcely veiled irony in his glance as, after shaking hands with the Chevalier, he bowed to the rest?

"I am fortunate," said Count Mortimer, "in meeting two gentlemen of such European reputation as Dr Texelius and Mr Rubenssohn. Of Dr Schaul I heard much while I lived in Thracia; and when I learned that he was throwing himself heartily into this movement, it seemed to me a fact of the happiest augury for the future."

"And pray, noble sir, are we to think the same of your own connection with the movement?" asked Dr Texelius.

"The answer to that question lies largely in your own hands, Herr Professor. Am I to rely upon your loyal support, or not?"

"My dear Count," interposed the host, in German, "these gentlemen are prepared to support you to the utmost of their power. I have just made them see that without your kind offices we could have no hope of success."

"I am glad to hear it, Chevalier. Perhaps it will set our friends' minds at ease if I explain, first of all, that I derive no pecuniary benefit from my connection with the movement. A busy man does not take kindly to an idle life, and I am glad to employ my leisure for so good an object."

"And do you wish us to understand that you cut yourself off from your class, and range yourself on the side of Israel in the sight of the world, purely for the sake of occupation and philanthropy?" snarled Dr Texelius.

"Herr Professor, I am a man who has not a little to avenge. If I choose to combine my own pleasure with the advantage of your nation, you will do well to be thankful and accept my help. Do we understand one another?"

"Your Excellency does not mince matters, nor will I. What guarantee have we that the interests of Israel will not be sacrificed to your own?"

"Your frankness charms me. You have no guarantee. But without my help the interests of Israel will remain where they are at present."

"Prove it!" shouted Dr Texelius. "How are we to know that you have the power to do what you pretend?"

"Simply by waiting to see. But do not mistake me, Herr Professor. I believe that you and Mr Rubenssohn enjoy considerable influence with the Jewish press. If we are to work together that influence must be employed exclusively and loyally on my side, which is your own. Should there

be the slightest attempt to weaken my position, or to form a cabal against me among your followers, I shall take my choice between getting rid of you and ceasing my efforts on behalf of Israel, which will then be far worse off than it is now. Do I make myself plain?"

"Your Excellency's demand is only reasonable," said Rubenssohn; while Dr Texelius spluttered inarticulately. "Such influence as a poor poet may possess is placed unreservedly at your service."

"And if your influence is used wrongly, my excellent Texelius," said the Chevalier Goldberg, "I shall find myself under the painful necessity of ceasing to finance your newspapers, when the annoyance will die a natural death."

"My fears are not for myself," was the sulky response. "If the Gentile is loyal to Zion, he shall have my support. But what reason is there for his joining us, and what good can he do us? That's what I want to know."

"Friend," said the Rabbi reprovingly, "if the noble gentleman is willing to forsake his own people and cast in his lot with Israel, is it for us to sneer at his chivalrous offer and throw doubt upon his motives? Surely he is one of the sons of the stranger who shall build the walls of Zion."

Cyril Mortimer bowed gravely to the Rabbi. "I give Dr Texelius free leave to trust me in private no further than he can see me, provided that he supports me in public," he said. "And now that this is settled, perhaps we may come to a clear understanding of the position. Through my friend the Chevalier Goldberg I am informed that you, gentlemen, form the executive of the guild called the Children of Zion, that your object is to colonise Palestine with Jews from Europe, buying out the present inhabitants where necessary, and that you are in command of a certain sum of money for this purpose, invested on proper security in a series of commercial schemes?"

"Of which the control is in Jewish hands," interjected Dr Texelius.

"Quite so. I understand also that the Chevalier has volunteered to bear the entire cost of obtaining the necessary concession from Roum, leaving you at liberty to devote the whole of your trust-funds to the work of colonisation. Indeed, gentlemen, you are to be congratulated. What with a sum of money to be paid down at the outset, and a yearly rent for the province, together with the necessary compensation, palm-oil, and perquisites, my friend will sacrifice a very large part of his fortune in giving your movement a favourable start. I honour his motives, and I only hope you appreciate his generosity."

"If Goldberg had shown this generosity ten years ago, the Land would be already repopulated by a thriving race of colonists," said Dr Texelius.

"There, Herr Professor, you are in error. The Chevalier could not show this generosity ten years ago for two reasons. In the first place, it has been the labour of years for him to establish the agreement now arrived at between the Jews of all nations, by which they bind themselves to assist the Children of Zion by bringing pressure on their respective Governments when it is needed. Without this solidarity of action, a band of selfish plutocrats in any one country might have overthrown the whole scheme. And in the second place, ten years ago I was not at liberty to devote myself to assuring the success of the movement."

"Which is now secured by your Excellency's adhesion." The tone was sarcastic in the extreme.

"You are very good, Herr Professor. To me it falls to direct the working of this new machine. Without a single head, to ensure the application of the pressure at the right moment and the right spot, the financial union would soon break up, or at best fall to pieces. It is my aim to produce the necessary effect before disintegration sets in, and I may

say I have every hope of success. The Children of Zion may colonise Palestine, but it is the United Nation Syndicate that will make their work possible."

"Under your Excellency's guidance."

"I hope so. You will perceive now the necessity there is for absolute unanimity. Our enemies will be on the watch for the slightest sign of dissension. There is one point upon which it may be desirable to give you a special warning. You are aware of the fanaticism of the Scythians and others with regard to the Holy Places? Now I think it highly probable that I shall be obliged to consent to the appointment of a Christian prince as governor-general, as a guarantee against their desecration."

"Oho, the thin end of the wedge!" cried Dr Texelius. "A Christian governor—a prince, too—with a Christian Court and army and executive. Where is our free and independent republic, in which the Jew might at last obtain security and justice? Rubenssohn—Rabbi—you have heard the Gentile speak, will you still believe that his forked tongue utters truth?"

"Friend Texelius, you insult his Excellency," said Rabbi Schaul. "How can it signify to us what precautions the Gentiles take in the vain hope of maintaining their ascendancy over Zion? Of what use would it be to us to draw up the wisest republican constitution, which would last but a day? Once we are restored to the land, He will come whose right it is to reign, and neither Christian prince nor atheistic republic can stand against Him."

"Beautiful dream!" murmured Rubenssohn, his eyes kindling, "but it is only a dream. A literal Messiah is an impossibility. The house of David is extinct, the monarchical principle incapable of revival among us. The Grand Seigneur may play the part of the Messiah in bringing us back, or there may be before us a Messianic age of peace and plenty, such as the prophets picture, but we need look for nothing more."

"Young man, will you limit the Holy One of Israel? A few years ago this return, for which we are planning, was counted impossible, but it is now at hand. The appearance and reign of Messiah will follow in due time."

"Rabbi, you are a dreamer!" cried Dr Texelius angrily. "Will you allow your absurd visions to interfere with practical politics?"

"Visions? You call the prophecies of the Divine Word absurd visions?" cried the Rabbi, trembling with mingled anger and alarm. "Let me go, Israel Goldberg. I dare not sit at the same table as this unbeliever."

"No, no; Texelius spoke more strongly than he intended," said the Chevalier, whose hair had grown grey in the endeavour to induce the orthodox and free-thinking sections of his co-religionists to work together. "He has the highest respect for your views, Rabbi, and I, as you know, share them."

"Well, let him show his respect for the prophecies by abandoning his opposition to Count Mortimer," said the old man, supporting himself with his shaking hands upon the table, "or I must withdraw from all association with him, and call upon my flock to do the same."

"I agree," said Dr Texelius hastily, for the defection of Rabbi Schaul's following would have been a serious blow to the movement. "Perhaps you will own some day, Rabbi, that it would have been better to take the advice of a practical man, but by all means let us all become dreamers together."

"If the learned Dr Texelius had listened more carefully to what I said," remarked Cyril, "he would have noticed that I proposed only to consent to the appointment, not to make it. That will be the business of the Powers, and while they are wrangling over it we are establishing ourselves in Palestine."

"But they will soon perceive that," said Rubenssohn.

"True; but I shall propose a commission, composed of the various consuls, to take charge of the Holy Places until the

governor is appointed. That will lead to further wrangling, but it will only give us more time."

"But why is time so necessary?" asked Rubenssohn.

"To enable us to import our Jews. You understand, Dr Texelius, there must be no interference with Christian communities or forcible dispossession of Moslems, nothing to give a pretext for European intervention. If you can't buy one piece of ground easily, turn to another. Do everything quietly, settle your Jews wherever there is room for them, and then we can confidently demand a *plébiscite* of the whole country, if we see the opportunity, or at least ask permission to elect a temporary governor until the Powers have agreed on their nominee. I need scarcely say that if the colonists possessed a spark of gratitude, their choice would fall on Dr Texelius, and the Powers might even be brought to confirm that appointment."

"So!" cried Dr Texelius, with evident pleasure, "I perceive that you are not wholly a dreamer, Count."

"Few men less so, Herr Professor. We are agreed, then? You will hurry on your part of the work by every means in your power, while I do my best to keep the attention of Europe fixed upon side-issues?"

"And if you are agreed upon that," cried the host, when the rest had signified their assent, "it would be as well for us to separate. I have been on thorns all the afternoon, lest the police should have noticed you coming to this house, friends. Unless the movement is to be rudely checked, you ought all to be on your way back to your own countries to-night."

At this very plain hint the conference broke up, its members leaving the mansion singly. The Rabbi went first, shuffling down the grand staircase in his shabby clothes, a decrepit figure in whom the most lynx-eyed police agent would have found a difficulty in recognising the chief spiritual guide of multitudes of orthodox Jews in Pannonia and

Southern Scythia. Rubenssohn, who had lived in England long enough to pass on the Continent for an Englishman, left the house openly, but by a different door, after taking a reverential farewell of Cyril, Dr Texelius utilising the moment by whispering to the Chevalier—

“I have classified your friend, Goldberg. His ambition is enormous, amounting, indeed, to mania. If Europe will not admire him, Europe may hate him, but it shall not disregard him.”

And Dr Texelius stumped down the stairs with an aggressive air peculiarly his own, which he joined on this occasion with the stateliness of demeanour proper to the future president of the Hebrew Republic. Meeting on the threshold a young Jewish *savant*, who had made the great philosopher’s acquaintance at a scientific congress, he responded affably to the timid greeting of the neophyte, and piqued his curiosity by informing him that he had just been investigating a very interesting case of lunacy.

Cyril and the Chevalier Goldberg, left alone together, looked at one another and smiled as the Professor’s footsteps died away.

“Well, Count,” said the host, “you hef seen our tools. What iss de prospect off your beink able to work wid dem?”

“The Rabbi is a fanatic and Rubenssohn an enthusiast,” was the reply; “but I had rather work with either of them than with our scientific friend. There is no one so suspicious as the man who has neither faith nor enthusiasm himself. However, we can’t afford to have his influence arrayed against us, so we must make the best of him.”

“Den you hef decided to ranche yourself on our side? What are your plens, my dear Count?”

“I think it will be best to go to Ludwigsbad, as I intended. Every one will be there this season.”

“True; all de great people, but you will be greater den any. Oh, my frient, let me hef my way about dis. You

shell treffel like a prince, you shell hef a whole wink of de best hotel resserfed for you. De worlt shell see det Israel iss not ungrateful to de Christian det helps her."

"I thought we had threshed this matter out already, Chevalier. Can't you see that the more I am seen to act on my own initiative, and the less as the agent of the United Nation, the better it is for both of us? I am the friendly go-between, the honest broker, no more. My out-of-pocket expenses I will accept, but nothing else, not even a commission. Living modestly, they can scarcely accuse me of having been bought by you, the next step to which would be that they would try to offer a higher price themselves."

"I see you are right, but I must hef your promise det you will not spare me in de way off expense. Entertainments, chourneys, telegrephs—nothink must be wantink det might lighten your labours or edd to de success off your mission. You promise me dis? And det second secretary you talked off—you will let me profide you wid de best I can find?"

"Thanks, Chevalier, but I won't have a Jew. Anything that would identify me in the general mind with your nation is to be avoided. I think of getting an Englishman, as the fellow will be more for ornament than use. Paschics is a perfect glutton for work, but when he is thrown into general society he cannot forget that he began life as a farm-labourer, and he becomes either servile or truculent. No one knows and regrets the fact better than he does, and he suggested himself that I should have some one else to receive visitors and do the light work, while he grapples with the bulk of it behind the scenes as he always has done."

"You hef indeed an attatched follower, Count."

"*One* attached follower, you may as well say, Chevalier, unless you count my servant, who is a faithful fool of the same sort."

"My frient," the Chevalier laid aside his smiling mask, and approached Cyril with intense solemnity as he stood

leaning against the window-frame, "I must ask you once more, hef you counted de cost off throwink in your lot wid us? At pressent, you are de most successful failure in Europe. Dere iss not one sofereign det would not obtain your help if he could, not one state det would not be enxious if deir enemies were employink you. You are receifed eferywhere, you may merry whom you please—for dere are heiresses off de noblest femilies det would think nothink off gifink you deir whole fortune, if only dey might accompany it—you are de frient off all de most powerful people. Will you gif up all dis for de sake off de oppressed Chews? We know what contempt—ill-treatment—iss like, for we are born to it; but you, a Christian and a noble, how will you bear it? Dey will treat you worse den us, for dey will say you are a traitor to dem."

"My dear Chevalier," the sarcasm had left Cyril's tone, and he looked at the stout little Jew with an earnestness almost equalling his own, "you are wasting your pity on me. After the knock-down blow I got two years ago, I must fight my way up again from the foot of the hill, and it won't make it any harder to do it in your cause. What I want is power, and with reasonable luck I stand to get it by means of this scheme. As to the personal consequences, don't trouble yourself about them. I knew what it was to be socially ostracised long ago in Thracia, and it did me no harm. I shall continue to be received wherever I like to go. As to marrying, there is only one woman in the world that I would choose to marry, and she is out of my reach already. I am committed to this enterprise, and I have no wish to draw back. Now what is it that has led you to make me this undesired offer of release?"

"Dere iss noose from Czarigrad," answered the Chevalier, in a tone in which relief blended with disappointment. "Chust before our meetink to-day I receifed a secret message det Hercynia hed discofered our negotiations wid Roum,

and was puttink pressure on de Grand Seignior to refuse us our concession. Dey must hef heard off your fissit to his Machesty."

"Ah, this is the declaration of war, then! Well, I am glad Hercynia has opened the ball, because I have such an excellent object-lesson in store for her. Let me see, Baron de la Mothe von Elterthal passes through Vindobona to-morrow on his way home from Czarigrad. He will spend a few hours here with his sister, Countess Temeszy. Count Temeszy is an old friend of my brother's, and will get me an interview without making any fuss. I shall see him to-night at the Opera, and we will settle things then. To-morrow the Chancellor shall have his warning, and we shall see whether it is necessary to proceed to extremities."

"Once you hef approached him on behalf off Israel, dere will be no drawink-back," said the Chevalier.

"There is none now. Well, Chevalier, I must be going."

"But you will lose no time in seekink det noo secretary?"

"Certainly not. My brother will help me in the matter. There was a young fellow hanging about at Llandiarimid the last time I was there who would suit me well enough, but I daresay he has found something better to do by this time."

"Farewell den, my frient. You may depend on me to keep you well posted in all de mofements off de enemy. I hef efery confidence in you, but I entreat you not to spare expense."

Cyril smiled as he succeeded in making his escape. It would have been a standing marvel to him, had he been inclined to waste time in theorising on the weaknesses of human nature instead of profiting by them, that the great financier, whose name ensured respect throughout the civilised world, should repose this absolute and deferential confidence in an unsuccessful statesman, whose sole political capital was now his vast experience, and a certain strength

of head, combined with coldness of heart, which had much advantaged him in the past. But Cyril was one who took things as he found them, and made prompt use of them ; and the doglike fidelity with which the Chevalier Goldberg clung to his fallen fortunes struck him merely as a very serviceable fact, which, though it might be strange, was by no means to be neglected.

CHAPTER II.

FIRING THE FIRST SHOT.

RETURNING to his hotel, Cyril found a letter awaiting him in the handwriting of his brother, Lord Caerleon.

"What's up?" he said to himself, as he opened the envelope and drew out the closely written sheets. "Something must be wrong for Caerleon to favour me with such an imposing epistle. Probably some kind mischief-maker on this side of the Channel has told him that I have given myself over body and soul to the Jews, and he is trying to avert the catastrophe. It would save time to burn the letter and wire to him that the deed is done, but that might hurt his feelings, so here goes!"

He lit a cigar and sat down with the air of a martyr to read the letter, but his brow cleared when he found that it contained none of the anxious entreaties he had expected. His brother needed his help, it seemed, and the occasion of the request was curiously connected with the subject of his conversation with the Chevalier Goldberg.

"You may remember," wrote Lord Caerleon, "a young fellow named Mansfield, who prepared Usk for college, and was staying with us when you were here two years ago. He is a thoroughly nice chap, and as we all took a fancy to him, Usk has brought him down again two or three times since he has been at Cambridge. That was all very well, but why should

he take it into his head to fall in love with Phil? I suppose you will smile your superior smile when you read that sentence; but I give you my word that the thought of such a thing had never entered my mind. It's only yesterday that Phil was about as high as the table, and running wild about the park with her hair flying loose. How is an unsuspecting parent to know that she has suddenly grown up, and is actually old enough to contemplate matrimony? I can tell you it was a frightful shock to Nadia and me. We sat looking at one another in consternation, until Nadia rallied sufficiently to remind me in a faint voice that the child will be twenty-one next month. Many girls are married before that, as she very truly added, but what comfort does that afford when one finds oneself all at once regarded as a stern and venerable elder? Well, as I said, we can have no possible objection to young Mansfield himself, except on the ground that he has nothing to do. He is a distant connection of Forfar's, and has the promise of a private secretaryship when a vacancy occurs, but that may not be for years. He has been hanging on at Cambridge since he took his degree, writing prize essays and (at least this is my private idea) keeping Master Usk up to the mark; but he sees as clearly as I do that that can't go on. He came to me very honourably when he first discovered the state of his feelings, and said that he did not dare ask me to sanction an engagement at present, but if he could get some settled employment, might he speak to Philippa? You know that desperation will make the most guileless of men artful, and therefore you won't wonder that I resorted to a mean expedient in order to keep my daughter a little longer. I said that Phil was so very young for her age, and had seen so little of the world (this is absolutely true, you know), that I should prefer him not to speak to her for a year in any case. In the meantime he might be getting something to do, and she should have a London season, and pay a visit to her god-

mother in Germany. It was a bitter pill, I could see, but he took it very well, and left Llandiarmid without saying a word to Phil, so that she knows nothing about the business. At least, that is my contention; but Nadia is under the impression that Phil has her own ideas on the subject. Still, the child is not pining, or I should give way at once. No doubt she sees, like a sensible girl, that it is the best possible thing for the young fellow not to be at a loose end any longer. Well, old man, you see by this time what I want of you. Do you know any one among your acquaintances who would take an Englishman as secretary, who is nothing very great in the way of attainments, but has the memory of a second-class in Modern Languages to fall back upon? He has travelled a good deal, and is a thoroughly pleasant fellow, rather too literary for my taste, but there's no harm in that. He has something of his own since his father's death, so that a high salary is not an object; what he wants is to be set to regular work, and taught to run in harness. If you know of anything suitable, I will bless you for ever, for my conscience is pricking me (and I believe Nadia, in her secret thoughts, blames me too) for condemning Phil and this inconvenient youth to a lengthy separation just because I don't want to lose the child." . . .

Long before he had reached this point, Cyril's mind was made up, and his answer to his brother's letter contained his response to the appeal made to him:—

"I want a second secretary, and your Mansfield is the very man for me. Please write to him at once, and let him meet me at the Hôtel Waldthier at Ludwigsbad this day week. We shall not haggle about terms, though Paschics will continue to do most of the work. By the bye, if association with me is likely to do your young friend harm in the future, don't let him come, but if there is no risk of his suffering in that way, he may take my word for it that he will learn a good deal that will be of use to him."

About two o'clock the next day Cyril presented himself at Count Temeszy's house for his interview with the Hercynian Imperial Chancellor, who was paying a strictly private visit of twelve hours or so to his sister. When Cyril's request was sprung upon him at the Opera, Gyula Temeszy had declared roundly that there was no prospect of his brother-in-law's visiting Vindobona at present. When it appeared, however, that Cyril was well acquainted with the Baron's movements, he not only promised him the desired interview, but invited him to lunch. This invitation Cyril refused, in view of the complications which might ensue when Baron de la Mothe von Elterthal had told his hosts of his discoveries at Czarigrad, and he had reason to congratulate himself upon his foresight. The Temeszy servants, who had hitherto bowed almost to the ground before him, received him on this occasion with a perfunctory civility that was little less than insulting; and when they turned him over to Baron de la Mothe von Elterthal's personal attendant, the man's manner showed a scarcely veiled insolence. Ushering Cyril into an unoccupied room, he promised to carry the noble Count's name to his master, but added that his Excellency was very much engaged, and might not be able to see him. For a quarter of an hour Cyril waited impatiently, within earshot of the luncheon-room in which, to judge from the noise and laughter, the Baron was the life and soul of a jovial party, then he rose and rang the electric bell sharply.

"Present my compliments to his Excellency," he said, watch in hand, when the servant appeared, "and tell him that as the fifteen minutes I was able to spare him have expired, I regret not to be able to see him."

The man, taken aback by this turning of the tables, poured forth a torrent of apologies and entreaties, but Cyril waved them aside, and passed down the grand staircase with a calm *hauteur* of demeanour which compelled the respect of the

servants in the hall. This time none of them failed in the due observances, and he left the house like an honoured guest. Before he had gone more than a few steps, Count Temeszy ran after him, bare-headed.

"Pray come back, Mortimer. I can't think what the servants were doing, that they didn't send in your name."

"Sorry I have no time to spare."

"Nonsense; come back. I can't let Caerleon's brother be turned away from my door like this."

Count Temeszy spoke with evident embarrassment, and Cyril was quick to draw the inference that he was now only to be tolerated as Caerleon's brother. He withdrew his arm from the Hungarian's grasp.

"Thanks, Temeszy; but there are doors enough open to me without darkening those where I am unwelcome. I will tell Caerleon how faithful you are to your ideas of friendship."

"But my brother-in-law is most anxious to see you. He is awaiting you at this moment with the greatest eagerness."

"My dear Count Temeszy, you only increase my regret that I cannot possibly spare him another moment. I am lunching at the Café Viborg, and you must excuse me if I hurry away."

Leaving Count Temeszy disconsolate on the pavement, Cyril disengaged himself with a ceremonious bow, and walked on. It was without any surprise that, when he was seated at his lunch a little later, he saw the Count and his brother-in-law enter the café. Glancing in his direction as if accidentally, they crossed the room to speak to him, and almost immediately a friend on the other side of the place claimed Count Temeszy's attention. With a muttered apology, he joined him at his table, and Baron de la Mothe von Elterthal sat down casually opposite Cyril.

"You had something to say to me, I believe?" he remarked.

"Not that I know of," was the disconcerting reply. "Hearing that you would be in Vindobona, I set aside a quarter of an hour for you for the sake of auld lang syne, but that was all."

"My brother-in-law understood that you were most anxious to see me. In fact, he was lamenting all morning that you had refused his invitation to lunch, until I reminded him that it was perhaps just as well, for at such short notice it would be difficult to ensure that there should be no pork on the table."

Cyril smiled. "You are in good spirits to-day, Baron. Still, I would advise you, as a friend, to let your jokes remain entirely between ourselves. Other people might fail to appreciate them."

"That is as I please," snapped the Baron. "Once more, have you anything to say to me?" as Cyril raised his eyebrows in well-bred surprise at his tone.

"Nothing whatever," said Cyril, choosing a cigarette with care. "Allow me to offer you—— You will not? No?"

"Perhaps," said the Baron darkly, leaning across the table, "you are not aware that I know all about your visit to Czari-grad, and the part you played there?"

"My dear Baron, this is ancient history. I am not aware that there is any reason why the whole world should not know as much."

"You have no objection to the world's knowing that you have sold yourself to the Jews, that you are the paid agent of the enemies of Christendom?"

"If it was true, I should probably object very much. As things are, I can only admire your simple faith, Baron."

"At least," said the Baron, changing his tactics suddenly, "neither you nor your new allies will benefit by your diplomacy on this occasion. I fancy I have put a spoke in your wheel, my dear Count."

"What!"—there was unmistakable alarm in Cyril's voice

—"you have not been so unwise as to interfere? When it was suggested to me the other day that you might possibly do so, I laughed at the notion. 'The Baron is my friend and a man of sense,' I said, 'he could not do such a foolish thing.' And now you wish me to understand that you have done it? My dear Baron, I am deeply concerned. Is there no way in which we can release you from this very unfortunate *impasse*?"

"I don't understand you," with evident anxiety. "Surely you are confusing my position with your own?"

"Baron, this is not the time for joking. Is it possible that in the course of your researches at Czarigrad you never discovered that the Palestine scheme and your Anatolian concession stand or fall together?"

"Pray, what do you know about the Anatolian concession, Count?"

"Just as much as I need to know. I am aware that it is of a very far-reaching character, and that a high and illustrious personage in Herecynia is determined to obtain it. You could not imagine, Baron, that I, your friend, could remain ignorant of your troubles of the last few months? Do you think I don't know of the immense difficulties you have had to encounter, and the fact that your Emperor is graciously pleased to believe that you are secretly opposing his will and encouraging the Grand Seignior to refuse to grant the concession? Your continuance in office depends upon your obtaining it, I am well aware, and now you have deliberately postponed it for an indefinite time. This is terrible!"

"The whole thing is your doing!" burst from the Chancellor. Cyril eyed him with mild reproof.

"This accusation is unworthy of you, Baron, when I am doing my best to extricate you from your deadlock."

"Tell me exactly what your threats are worth. Whether you are a paid agent of the Children of Zion, or a Quixotic philanthropist," sneeringly, "the trap is yours, I know that."

"I have neither the power nor the necessity to threaten. I simply say that if our concession is refused, yours will be refused also, or if ours is merely delayed, yours will suffer in the same way. If ours is granted——"

"Yes?" with intense eagerness.

"Yours will also be granted when the time comes, and Baron de la Mothe von Elterthal will continue to be the chief ornament of the Hercynian bureaucracy and the favoured adviser of his sovereign."

"What are they paying you for this?" broke out the Baron. "Thunder and lightning, man! if you are hard up, why not apply to us? We would have found some place for you, or screwed a decent subsistence out of ungrateful Thracia. Why accept the first offer, instead of waiting for a higher?"

"You are agitated, my dear Baron. Take one of these cigarettes, just to please me, and calm yourself. Did you ever, in the course of our former dealings together, find that any good came of trying to insult me?"

"Never; I always paid for it dearly. Yes, you are right, I am a fool. No doubt I am expiating at this moment the errors of my last interview with you. What?" as Cyril's impassive face relaxed slightly, "I am right. Oh, pray consider all that I said about money withdrawn. You are taking your revenge upon Europe, I see. You would destroy the world, if you could, to punish the faults of mankind towards you."

"This is very interesting, Baron, but not particularly practical."

"No? Well, tell me, how can you and your Children of Zion, with their hoarded centimes and kopecks and piastres, hope to oppose yourselves to the power of the Hercynian empire? We can tire you out at Czarigrad, simply because we have a longer purse."

"I will let you into a secret, Baron. Try your experiment,

and oppose our concession. You will find that it is not you who will tire us out, but we you, and for this reason, that you will be pitting yourself against all the Jews in the world. The Children of Zion are backed by a syndicate composed of the capitalists of all nations, and Hercynia would scarcely be well advised to enter on a war with them. I don't ask you to accept this merely on my authority. Make the experiment, and you will see whether the result bears out my warning."

"This is a very serious matter, Count." The Baron had sat lost in wonder, supporting his chin on his hand, for some minutes. "Do you see that you are practically declaring war on Europe?"

"Not quite, Baron. It is not necessary for all Europe to oppose itself to the United Nation. Think of the other side of the picture. What a future would lie before the country which had the support of all the Jews in the world!"

Baron de la Mothe von Elterthal drew a long breath. "You dazzle me, Count! Am I to understand this as an offer?"

"As a conditional offer," said Cyril, rising; "conditional on your supporting us at Czarigrad. I will leave you to think it over, for I must get back to my hotel, unless I am to lose the train for Charlottenbad."

"We part as—as friends, I hope? Gyula," as Count Temeszy paused near them, in the course of an impatient promenade up and down the room, "I am venturing to offer Count Mortimer a seat in your carriage. We might drive him to his hotel."

"With the greatest pleasure," said Count Temeszy, in hopeless bewilderment, and presently the servants were edified to behold Count Mortimer seated beside the Hercynian Chancellor in their master's carriage, and not only escorted up the steps of the hotel by the man who had denounced him that morning as a pervert to Judaism, but

fervently embraced at parting. As for Cyril himself, it did not surprise him in the least to receive, a week later, a cipher telegram from the Chevalier Goldberg to the following effect :—

“Hercynian opposition suddenly withdrawn, after various attempts to out-manceuvre us in matter of Anatolian concession. Fear secrecy is now at an end, for business has become known to English journalist. Suspect Hercynian Embassy at Czarigrad of communicating news, hoping to rouse Scythia to action.”

“So!” murmured Cyril to himself, in the long-drawn, meditative German fashion, as he translated the cipher. “Then the battle is beginning in earnest. That is a smart dodge of yours, my dear Baron, to set Scythia on our track, knowing that we can’t hope to bring the matter home to you. I suppose the English papers all revelled in a nice little sensation yesterday. Mr Mansfield !”

Cyril was sitting in the balcony belonging to his *appartement* in the Hôtel Waldthier at Ludwigsbad, and a young man came hurriedly to the window in answer to his summons. There was nothing in any way remarkable about the new secretary’s appearance—at least to an English eye. Brown-haired and hazel-eyed, tall, broad-shouldered, and carelessly dressed, he would have been passed over at home as “a most ordinary-looking man,” but on the Continent it was his fate to attract attention as a typical Englishman wherever he went.

“Have you found anything in the papers about our business?” Cyril asked him.

“I was just going to bring your Excellency this.” Mansfield tendered a Vindobona evening journal to his employer.

“Just read me the paragraph. And by the way, don’t ‘Excellency’ me in private. The King was good enough to continue me in the use of the title when I left Thracia,

but it may be kept for state occasions. And don't call me 'sir,' as you have done once or twice, or it will get about that I am arrogating to myself princely honours. I must ask you to address me as 'Count,' if your instinctive veneration for me demands the use of some epithet."

The reproof was given so genially that it was impossible to take offence, and Mansfield, who had grown very red, returned gradually to his normal colour, and translated the paragraph with very fair fluency:—

"The London 'Fleet Street Gazette' publishes a telegram from its correspondent in Czarigrad which exposes a deep-laid conspiracy on the part of the Jews to possess themselves of Palestine. A concession is on the point of being obtained from the Grand Seignior which authorises the development of the whole country by a Hebrew syndicate, and its colonisation by Jewish immigrants. The intermediary at Czarigrad is understood to have been the Englishman Mortimer, of Thracian notoriety."

Mansfield's voice dropped when he came to the last word, and he glanced fearfully at Cyril, expecting to find him pained, possibly indignant; but seeing that he was smoking placidly, he took heart of grace.

"I expected this. Are you a thin-skinned person, Mansfield?"

"I don't think so—I really don't know," stammered Mansfield.

"I mean, can you stand being generally cold-shouldered, if not actually cut? Do you yearn for constant communion with your kind?"

"I suppose I could stand being sent to Coventry without whining. Is that the sort of thing?"

"Exactly. If I am not mistaken, that is the fate which will be meted out to you and me for the next few days. If your spirits are liable to give way under it, you had better go home at once."

"Count!" There was no mistaking the chagrin in the young man's tone, and Cyril laughed encouragingly.

"That's all right. I only wanted to prepare you for the worst. Well, shall we take a little stroll? If you are anxious to put my powers of prophecy to the proof, we might pay a few visits."

The prospect of being turned from the doors of the persons visited did not commend itself to Mansfield, however, and Cyril and he strolled across the bridge and into the tree-shaded Neue Wiese or promenade. The stern regulations in vogue at Ludwigsbad permit an afternoon walk, but do not enforce it, and the gardens and the Königspark were not therefore crowded with *Kurgäste*, as would be the case a little later in the day. Still, there were a fair number of restless sufferers endeavouring to satisfy their consciences by a feverish activity in lounging up and down, or taking duty drives to points of interest, in company with the faithful relations who had attended them into exile, and Mansfield watched with a painful attention their demeanour towards his employer. He himself had arrived only the day before, and Cyril had carried him off almost immediately to an informal dinner-party at an open-air restaurant, where a little knot of men bearing historic names, and of women famous all over Europe for their beauty, had laughed and talked and jested, as they discussed the unappetising fare allowed them, like members of a very happy, simple-hearted, and united family. The novelty of the occasion had a little intoxicated him, and when the party broke up at nine o'clock it had needed a brisk walk along the Charlottenbad road, and an indulgence in thoughts of Philippa, such as he rarely allowed himself, to enable him to sleep at all. The unexpected friendliness of these great people had been astonishing enough, but it would be nothing compared with a sudden change to coolness, such as Cyril seemed to anticipate. Just as Mansfield, in his thoughts, had reached this point, he saw a carriage approach-

ing in which sat the loveliest and friendliest of the ladies of the evening before. The Countess von Hohenthurm was a celebrated Pannonian beauty, and was commonly considered the haughtiest woman in the empire ; but she had taken Mansfield under her wing at the dinner-party, explaining the half-veiled personal allusions with which the conversation was largely sprinkled, and confiding to him various indiscreet revelations respecting notable people then staying or expected at the baths. As she came towards him now, Mansfield raised his hand instinctively towards his hat, but Cyril's voice at his side said, "Wait. It is possible that the lady has not the pleasure of your acquaintance."

The idea seemed preposterous, for the Countess, in response to some remark made by the elderly lady who was driving with her, had turned her head in the direction of the two Englishmen, but there was no glance of recognition as her eyes met theirs. Without the movement of a muscle or the slightest change of colour, she looked through them both at the trees behind. It was beyond question that in the world of the Countess von Hohenthurm there existed no such persons as Count Mortimer and his secretary.

"Don't look so utterly crushed," said Cyril, giving Mansfield's arm a gentle shake. "Didn't I tell you how it would be?"

Mansfield walked on in silence, with compressed lips. Presently they met two of the gentlemen with whom they had dined, but these were so deeply engrossed in conversation as to be unable to recognise them. Next they passed a rustic seat, behind which rose a rock bearing an inscription to the effect that the Archduke Ferdinand Joachim desired to testify to the benefit he had derived from a course of the Ludwigsbad waters. Here there sat a hideous elderly man, of generous proportions, who was laying down the laws of fashion to two or three admiring disciples, with all the confidence to be expected in the recognised arbiter of taste at

the baths. He also had been one of the guests of the night before, and Mansfield had conceived an instinctive dislike to him—a dislike which was not now lessened by his putting up an eyeglass, and wondering audibly, in terms of unnecessary emphasis, “Who those fellows might be that looked like Englishmen?”

“Well?” said Cyril, as they passed on; “was I a true prophet?”

“Yes; oh yes. But why—what does it all mean?”

“It means that they believe, or pretend to believe, that we are leagued with the Jews against them, and therefore, very naturally, they feel obliged to mark their disapproval of us.”

“But will it go on? How long will they keep it up?”

“Oh yes, it will go on, for exactly three days and a half. Remember that. Until then, I fear that you and I shall be confined to each other’s society. Pray talk as much as you like. I shall be delighted to listen.”

“I should like to say a word or two to that fellow,” muttered Mansfield, indicating by a backward glance the oracle of fashion.

“I earnestly hope you won’t. In the first place, he would not understand your German, and your righteous indignation would therefore be wasted. In the next, I would rather not kill him if I can help it.”

“Kill him? how?”

“With a sword, my dear youth. Excuse me, but you are really so refreshingly young. Is it beyond your powers of imagination to conceive that if you insulted him he would forthwith challenge me?”

“I can look after my own quarrels, Count,” very haughtily.

“In that case I should very soon have a funeral to look after in the British cemetery,” was the calm reply. “The man is a noted duellist, and you would be at his mercy

in two minutes. With me as his antagonist, I will be conceited enough to say, things would be reversed. Since you are so kind as to propose to quarrel with him on my account, perhaps I may be allowed to intimate that I prefer a living secretary to a dead one."

Mansfield, with an embarrassed laugh, yielded the point, although he did not succeed in arriving all at once at his employer's pitch of philosophy. As they walked on, Cyril amused himself by detecting and commenting upon the shifts to which his acquaintances were reduced in order to escape seeing him. The ostracism was complete, and he pointed out to Mansfield that it must have been decreed only that morning—probably as soon as the Vindobona papers arrived. It so happened that there were no royal personages at the baths at present; but among the sojourners there was a large contingent of the Pannonian nobility, and it was from these, doubtless, that the fiat had gone forth which declared Count Mortimer to be from henceforth beyond the pale of society. A determined enemy, or even a mere busybody, could easily have found means to promulgate the news during those hours of the morning which were supposed to be devoted to rest, when authority had once spoken. It proved that no one was sufficiently courageous to disobey the edict but the officials of the place, who themselves saluted Cyril with an expression which said that this courtesy was not a reflection of their personal feelings, and that their sympathies were with his opponents. Matters were not improved on the arrival of the English papers, for it was discovered that the Vindobona journal which had done all the mischief had omitted one item of special interest in its quotation from the 'Fleet Street Gazette.' "The sudden collapse of the Hercynian opposition to Count Mortimer's scheme," wrote the correspondent at Czarigrad, "is thought here to be the result of the kind of business arrangement vulgarly known as a 'deal.' In other words, the Imperial Government has been bought off." This

was enough. The hatred always smouldering between the two Teutonic empires burst forth once more in the breasts of their representatives at Ludwigsbad, and the few Hercynians at the baths found themselves shunned almost as completely as Cyril, with whom their own convictions effectually forbade them to fraternise.

CHAPTER III.

IN SILVER SLIPPERS.

DURING the three days and a half anticipated by Cyril, he and his secretary remained under a ban, and moved about among the crowds of *Kurgäste* as little noticed as if they had been two invisible men, and almost as freely as if they had had Ludwigsbad to themselves. They were apparently unseen when, with their Bohemian glass tumblers suspended from their buttonholes, they joined the shivering throngs that surround in the early morning the kiosks from which the horrible healing waters are dispensed, and partook of their respective draughts, Cyril taking the proper eight glasses and Mansfield only one, purely for the sake of sociability. In the promenade which followed they met no one who was conscious of ever having seen them before; and when they had bought the regulation rolls and sat down to drink their coffee at a little table surrounded by scores of others, they were not only alone but unperceived in the crowd. In the afternoon they paid no visits and received none; and at dinner-time, when merry parties were formed round all the restaurant-tables, they sat down alone save for the company of the taciturn Thracian secretary Paschics, who seemed to be given over to perpetual mourning for the high position his employer had once held and lost. Not that their isolated condition made their table less gay than the rest.

Cyril, always debonnaire and cheerful, exerted himself determinedly on these occasions to bring a smile to the melancholy countenance of Paschies, with the result that Mansfield became almost exhausted with laughing. The waiters hovered attentively in their neighbourhood, eager to catch a stray joke; and even the Kurdirektor, a very high and mighty autocrat indeed, found himself tempted by the peals of laughter to smoke a cigarette and partake of dessert in company with these victims of popular disapproval. One evening there was a dance after dinner at the Kursaal, and Cyril and Mansfield strolled in among the spectators, enjoying hugely the promptness with which way was made for them, as though they had been royal personages, or surrounded by an invisible but tangible fence. That is to say, Cyril enjoyed the experience frankly for its own sake, and Mansfield because he reflected that it was in Cyril's cause he was undergoing it. Two years of fairly constant intercourse with Lady Philippa Mortimer had not tended to diminish his early veneration for her adored uncle, and there was also the further consolation for such hardship as his lot involved that she would regard it with sympathy—even with admiration.

The evenings on which there was no dancing were equally amusing in their way. Wandering through the shrubberies of the Königspark in the summer twilight, Cyril found himself accosted in sheltered corners first by one man and then by another who did not dare to dispute the general edict in public, but thought it might be advisable to remain friends with both sides under the rose. Naturally these people were not of the class or character with whom friendship was most desirable, being chiefly gentlemen who lived by their wits, with a sprinkling of Jews who believed that the Chevalier Goldberg had bought Cyril for their nation, and that this justified them in claiming his services for themselves, and it was a never-ending amusement to Mansfield to observe

the adroitness with which Cyril snubbed them and dropped them promptly back into their proper places. There was one elderly capitalist who seemed to have been mildly coerced by the Chevalier into giving in his adhesion to the national movement, for on three separate occasions he pursued Cyril with a mournful persistence, endeavouring to persuade him that, since the masters of money throughout Europe were now for once united, it was folly to waste the force of such a combination on the mere acquisition of Palestine, when it might be used to establish a universal empire on a financial basis. The contrast between the frail, cringing figure of the old man, and his world-embracing schemes, was sufficiently ludicrous; but he stuck to his point until Cyril asked him what the hapless Jews scattered throughout Europe, on whom the popular fury would at once fall in case his plan was attempted, would think of him. Then he wrung his hands and made as though to rend his clothes, and departed sorrowful.

The three days mentioned by Cyril as the duration of the ostracism had elapsed; but when the usual visit to the springs was paid on the fourth morning, Mansfield noticed no change in the demeanour of the *Kurgäste*. People still looked over, round, and through the two Englishmen, and avoided carefully coming into the slightest personal contact with them as they stood waiting their turn to receive the hot and loathsome beverage. But when the unpleasant duty had been performed, and the drinkers turned away from the kiosk and into the promenade, the event occurred which Cyril had foreseen. Approaching the spring was a tall grey-bearded man of military appearance, walking with two others, who maintained their position a step behind him on either side, and to whom he turned and spoke occasionally. In the foreground, ranged in two lines and leaving an ample path for the new-comer, were all the most aristocratic of the Ludwigsbad visitors, bowing and curtsying with the deepest

reverence as he reached them, and manifestly overjoyed when they received a personal greeting.

"The Emperor of Pannonia," whispered Cyril to Mansfield. "Watch!"

How it happened Mansfield did not clearly see, since he was doing his best to copy the elaborate bows of the Pannonian magnates, but he was aware that the Emperor caught sight of Cyril, beckoned him forward, greeted him warmly, and requested him to turn and walk with him a short distance. Standing rather in the background, Mansfield was able to perceive and appreciate the expressions of astonishment and chagrin which chased one another over the countenances of the crowd that attended the Emperor, but he had little time to reflect upon their discomfiture, for a sign from Cyril warned him to fall into line with the two equerries, so that he could no longer observe the results of the Imperial condescension on the Emperor's subjects. As for Cyril, he knew the reason of this friendly address, and had anticipated it. A Court scandal of a peculiarly unpleasant character had just been averted by means of the ready help of the Chevalier Goldberg. Not for the first time an archducal household had been established with the aid of the Chevalier's money, and a secret threatening the honour of the Imperial house and the happiness of a young bride was safely locked up in the Chevalier's breast. The Emperor was duly grateful, and having been informed of the connection between the Chevalier and Cyril, was doing honour to the one man by way of gratifying the other. He had, moreover, something to say also to Cyril himself.

"This Palestine scheme of yours, Count—I am glad to have the opportunity of speaking to you about it. Is there any prospect of your being successful?"

"I see no insuperable difficulty in our way at present, sir."

"Well, I only hope you may succeed—as far as possible, that is—for there is no chance of getting rid of the whole

body of Jews. The fewer that remain in Europe the more business will there be for those few, and I should fear that the emigrants will all come flocking back when they see how things are going. Still, you may relieve us of the lowest class of Jew for a time, at any rate, and that will do something to simplify our heart-breaking problems here. But before I can commend your scheme unreservedly, Count, I must be satisfied on one point of the utmost importance. You are aware that I number among my titles that of King of Jerusalem, and that two at least of my brother monarchs claim the right to do the same. We are hereditary guardians of the Holy Places, and you must see that it would not only be abhorrent to ourselves personally, but absolutely impossible, in view of the sentiment of Christendom, to place them in the power of the Jews."

"That has been clearly foreseen, sir. It was the intention of the board whom I represent to request the Powers to nominate a Christian governor, who should make the Holy Places his chief care."

"You make no suggestion as to the person to be nominated, Count?" The Emperor turned a keen glance upon Cyril.

"None, sir. It is obvious that the Prince to be chosen must be a man of liberal views, or he would fail to obtain the suffrages of all the Powers, but that is the only suggestion we could venture to offer. I suppose the governor would maintain order, as at present, by the aid of a Moslem guard; but it would be necessary to allow the Jews free access to the spots which they consider holy, and which they are now debarred from approaching. That proviso can hardly fail to commend itself to your Majesty as fair, I think?"

"It is only natural, and would affect no one but the Roumis, I imagine. Well, Count, you have relieved my mind. It will not surprise you to hear that urgent representations against your scheme have been made to me from several quarters, and without this very equitable proposal of

yours I should have been forced to fall in with the views they expressed. Now, however, I am able to say that in my opinion you offer adequate protection for Christianity and the Holy Places, and I shall act accordingly. You are taking the waters here, I believe? I am glad to know you are at hand, in case I wish to consult you again on this subject."

Thus graciously dismissed, Cyril mingled again with the crowd—a crowd that was now as anxious to propitiate as it had hitherto been to ignore him. During the next five minutes, three men, one of whom was the arbiter of fashion, asked him to dinner that night, and the Countess von Hohenthurm vouchsafed him the honour of carrying the paper bag containing her breakfast-roll. Tactless people complained of their bad eyesight, or lamented that they had not heard Count Mortimer was at the baths until this morning, but the tactful simply took up their acquaintance with him at the point where they had dropped it three days before. Cyril met their overtures in the same spirit, and his sole piece of revenge was to tell his entertainers at breakfast all the news of the last three days, as though they had only just arrived—a piece of pleasantry which brought to Mansfield's face a passing gleam of satisfaction. Cyril took him to task for his lowering brow as they returned to the hotel, and told him that when the Countess von Hohenthurm was so condescending as to show an interest in a young man, it behoved that young man to be grateful, and to look it.

"They are all a set of sycophants!" returned Mansfield sharply. "How you can make friends of them again, I can't imagine."

"I don't make friends of them, but they are fellow-members of society, and it would serve no good purpose to quarrel with them. If I was in their place, I should have acted precisely as they have done."

"You won't get me to believe that!" said Mansfield, with an air of mild reproof which Cyril found irresistibly comic.

"Why, how would you have had me mark my sense of their behaviour?" he asked.

"I don't see how you can meet them again with any cordiality. Why not decline the honour of their further acquaintance?"

"Because we live in the great world, and not in Arcadia. You young people brought up virtuously in England have something terribly stagey about you. You are all for great *coups*, but that sort of thing doesn't do in ordinary life. You remind me very much of my brother Caerleon as a young fellow. I don't think I was ever so ineffably young myself. I hope not, at any rate. Melodrama is not good form."

Much crushed by these remarks, which he received as a rebuke, Mansfield remained silent, and Cyril, observing this, administered a restorative as they entered the hotel.

"Never mind. I prefer you as you are. A little melodrama in private is rather amusing than otherwise, and in society you are a model of discretion, except as regards your looks. Those you must learn to control a little, but don't think that I want you not to tell me what you think."

He spoke rather absently, for the post had come in while they were out, and the table in his room was covered with letters and newspapers. He began at once to open the letters, while Mansfield turned to the papers and began his daily task of looking through them in search of any reference to the United Nation scheme.

"There is a very hostile article in this Scythian paper, Count," he said after a time, looking round.

"Ah! what paper?"

"The 'Pavelsburg Gazette.'"

"Good! then it's inspired. Give me a rough translation, please."

Mansfield was now accustomed to requests of this kind, and went through the article as rapidly as his somewhat imperfect knowledge of Scythian permitted. The writer was absolutely

appalled by the news which had come from Czarigrad by way of England, and called upon all Christians to rise and prevent the proposed transfer of Palestine to Jewish hands. So sacrilegious an outrage could not be allowed to proceed, and it was the glorious privilege of the Emperor of Scythia, as head of the Orthodox Church and protector of the Holy Places, to prevent it. There was not a Scythian that would not give his life freely in such a cause, and the sooner the necessary steps were taken the better. It might be well even to proclaim a crusade, and end the Jewish difficulty at one blow by sweeping the whole of the accursed race from the earth.

"Very pretty!" said Cyril, "and evidently meant to prepare the way for effective action. Scythia has already sounded the other Powers, no doubt; I thought as much from what the Emperor said to me just now. Well, I have put a spoke in her wheel, I fancy. When she finds there is nothing to be done in that direction, she will proceed to push matters to extremities at Czarigrad, and then comes the tug of war."

"But can you hope to put sufficient backbone into the Grand Seignior to enable Roum to stand up against her?" asked Mansfield, surprised by the confident tone.

"No, that would be beyond the wit of man, but I intend to put a little gentle pressure on Scythia instead."

"Would it spoil your plans if you told me how you intend to do it? I can't imagine how you will manage."

Cyril smiled pleasantly. "There is a famine in Scythia at this moment," he said; "so much you know already. You know also that it must be pretty bad for the Scythian papers to be allowed to acknowledge its existence at all. There is also a rising in Central Asia that looks threatening. The sufferers from the famine must be helped, and the rising must be put down, but where is the money to come from? Such hoards as the peasantry may have amassed in good years are exhausted by this time, and there are no Jews left in the rural districts to borrow from. The Government will have to step

in, but though the war-chest is full, its contents must be kept intact in view of a possible European war, and there is very little money in the country otherwise. To improve matters, certain shrewd gentlemen in America have arranged a corner in cereals, with a special eye to this famine and the consequent demand. Now do you see where we come in, when it becomes evident that there is no money to be obtained in all Europe if our scheme is thwarted at Czarigrad?"

"You mean to starve them out?" said Mansfield, with more than a touch of horror in his tone.

"By no means. We take our pound of flesh, which is Palestine, that's all."

"What a queer-looking old chap that is over there, Count!" said Mansfield to Cyril, as they were taking their walk one morning about a week after the Emperor's arrival. "He might be a stage brigand."

Cyril glanced in the direction he indicated. "Why, that is my venerable friend Prince Mirkovics!" he cried. "Who would ever have dreamt of meeting him here? I thought he never left Thracia."

He crossed the promenade with a rapid step, and accosted the old man whose truculent air and fierce white moustache had attracted Mansfield's attention. The garb of civilisation sat awkwardly upon Prince Mirkovics, and it was obvious that he felt ill at ease without the pistols and dagger which adorned his girdle when in Thracian costume; but the scornful frown with which he had been contemplating the vanities of Ludwigsbad vanished when he caught sight of Cyril, whom he greeted with beaming smiles.

"I will join you in your walk, Count, if you will allow me," he said, when Mansfield had been duly introduced to him. "I have a good deal to tell you."

"Two years' Thracian news!" said Cyril lightly. "I have avoided hearing or reading anything of the kind, on principle,

since I left Thracia, but I felt all the time that it was only accumulating, to overwhelm me some day."

"His Excellency loves to jest," remarked Prince Mirkovics solemnly to Mansfield. "Perhaps," he added, turning again to Cyril, "you are not even aware that his Majesty intends to visit Ludwigsbad? I believe he was to arrive to-day."

"What, King Michael?" cried Cyril. "No, I had not heard it. Why, Mr Mansfield, how is this? It's your business to keep me posted up in the names of the expected arrivals. Oh, is that it?" as Mansfield began a stammering defence; "you thought it might call up unpleasant memories, and therefore you left me to meet him unawares? I am not quite so sensitive as that, you know, and you needn't be so very anxious to spare my feelings."

"The Princess of Dardania is naturally coming as well," continued Prince Mirkovics.

"Surely not? Why, her husband has only been dead for ten or twelve months. She is far too clever to outrage propriety by coming to such a place as this so soon."

"She does not dare to stay away, Count. The quarrel with her eldest son has forced her to quit Dardania, and the coolness which came to a head before that between herself and her elder daughter closes Mœsia to her. Thracia is her only hope, for if King Michael should break his promise to marry the Princess Ludmilla, she would be discredited on all sides."

Cyril's eyes flashed ominously. "Then her Nemesis has overtaken her already?" he said.

"It has, Count, at least so far as regards the marriage project which threw you out of office. Her Royal Highness is a clever woman, but she has so much at stake in this affair that she has failed to show her customary tact. She has kept too tight a hand over young Michael, made the chain by which she has bound him to her daughter too evident, and if he could muster sufficient courage, he would break it. He

slipped away from Thracia without her knowledge, well aware that she would oppose his coming here, and she, her daughter, and her household, are following him promptly. But everything will be done with propriety, my dear Count. She has borrowed the Grand-Duke Eugen's villa, and will receive none but relations."

"Still, the proceeding sounds a little undignified," said Cyril drily.

"So much the better, Count, provided it fails. That woman is the curse of Thracia. Since you left us she has filled the Ministry, the army, and the civil service with Scythian sympathisers—for Drakovics, in his second childhood, is nothing but her tool—with the result that we are now bankrupt in all but name."

"Bankrupt? and I left the treasury full!"

"Bankrupt. Such changes cost money, Count, both for rewarding friends and bribing foes. The King, again—he is a young gentleman of taste, and must spend liberally on his pleasures. The increase of the army—we could approve of that, for he is Otto Georg's son, and should be a born soldier. The beautifying of the capital and the construction of needless public works—well, it provides employment for the proletariat, and no doubt he has inherited his mother's charitable disposition. But when it comes to squandering money upon theatres and pictures, and subsidising musicians and dubious foreigners of all sorts—then, Count, we remember that he is the grandson of Luitpold of Weldart, and we tremble."

"And does the Princess approve of these artistic pleasures?"

"By no means, Count; but she cannot persuade his Majesty to relinquish them, and since his mother left Thracia there is no one else who can even pretend to influence him."

"But what a shameful thing for the Queen to leave Thracia when she had allowed her son to bring all this trouble upon the kingdom!" broke in Mansfield, who had imbibed from Lady Philippa an inveterate dislike of the woman whom she

regarded as her uncle's evil genius. "What has she done with herself?"

"Young man," said Prince Mirkovics severely, "her Majesty was deeply affected by the unhappy events which drove Count Mortimer from Thracia. Her uncontrollable grief reflected so severely upon her son and the Princess of Dardania, that they proposed to place her in seclusion, alleging that she suffered from delusions. Warned in time, the Queen succeeded in escaping from the kingdom, accompanied by several faithful members of her household. From Czarigrad, where she took refuge, she made terms with her son, who agreed to pay her jointure without protest if she withdrew altogether from politics in future. Her Majesty then retired to a community of Protestant nuns on Mount Lebanon, where she occupies herself in good works and in bewailing the past. My daughter is one of those who share her exile, gladly devoting their lives to the service of their unfortunate mistress. Count Mortimer knows that I disliked the Queen's being appointed regent, but nothing can excuse King Michael's conduct to his mother."

Cyril had remained silent while Prince Mirkovics spoke. His face was very pale, and it was with evident difficulty that he said—

"Have you no remedy to propose for the state of things in Thracia, Prince?"

"I have; but it is a drastic one. You wonder, perhaps, to see me here? Do you know that I am on my way home from England—I who have never left Thracia before? I visited your brother, to inquire whether there was any hope of his returning to the throne in this extremity."

"My dear Prince!"

"How are we better off than when we were under the house of Franza, Count? Your brother came to our help then, but he refuses now."

"And quite right, too. Accepting the offer of a vacant

throne is a very different thing from annexing an occupied one."

"Well, Count, we turn to you. Will you return to Thracia as Prime Minister? The country is on our side, and we propose to set before the King the alternatives of accepting you as Premier or as Regent. The Constitution makes provision for such an appointment in case of the incurable extravagance or deliberate viciousness of the monarch."

"Pray speak lower, Prince. You are talking treason, and in Ludwigsbad the very rocks have ears. No; I cannot come. I have other work on hand."

"You are doing something for the Jews. Oh, throw them over."

"Not in favour of Thracia, at any rate. Thracia had me once, and resigned me with quite unnecessary willingness. Now she may want me, but she can't have me. The punishment is deserved."

"But for our sakes, Count,—your friends?"

"No, Prince, I am not up to it. I gave the best part of my life to building up a workable and fairly honest system of government, and two years have been enough to reduce it to chaos. I could not submit to the years of weary office drudgery over again. New work I can take up and carry through; but I have lost the patience and elasticity I used to possess, and I will not fail where I succeeded once."

CHAPTER IV.

A DISTURBING ELEMENT.

THE bitter words in which Cyril renounced all interest in Thracia were interrupted by an exclamation from Mansfield, who was staring incredulously at a little party of people approaching from one of the winding paths. There were an old lady in a bath-chair, a girl, and a young man, the last two unmistakably English.

"Don't you see, Count? It's Lady Phil and Usk!" cried Mansfield, quickening his steps; but Cyril caught him by the arm.

"Wait a minute, Mansfield. Did my brother stipulate that you were not to speak to Lady Phil during this year of probation? If he did, I will curb my natural longing to see my niece, and we will turn our backs upon danger."

"Oh, no, really!" Mansfield was horror-struck by the suggestion. "I was not to follow her about; but I was never forbidden to speak to her if we met. Lord Caerleon trusted me, I am sure."

"Caerleon was always trustful," said Cyril unkindly; but he consented to keep pace with Mansfield's hurrying feet, and was considerate enough to allow the young people to greet one another apart, while he presented Prince Mirkovics in due form to Princess Soudaroff, an exiled Scythian lady who occupied the position of godmother to both the Marchioness

of Caerleon and her daughter. Had the matter rested with him, he would have left them to themselves for a longer time, but Prince Mirkovics, who was standing with his hat in his hand, looked at him reproachfully.

"Alas, Count! am I not to enjoy the honour of being presented also to Madame your niece?"

"Prince Mirkovics accords you royal honours, Phil," said Cyril. "Is it necessary to mention that Lady Philippa is Lord Caerleon's daughter, Prince?"

"Quite unnecessary, Count. Madame must not come to Thracia unless she comes as queen. There are still old men who remember her father's reign, and it goes without saying that all the young men would be ready to champion the cause of such a lady."

"I'm so glad you think me like my father," said Philippa, in her old impulsive way. "But even if he was still King of Thracia, I shouldn't be of any importance, you know. Usk would be the great person, not I."

Prince Mirkovics glanced at the slight dark-haired youth whose mirthful grey eyes met his across the bath-chair, and shook his head.

"No, madame, Milord Usk resembles your mother too much. She was a beautiful girl, indeed—I remember seeing her at the municipal ball given in honour of your father's arrival at Bellaviste—but to us she is only the woman for whose sake Carlino forsook Thracia."

"What a horrid way of putting it!" cried Philippa. "You ought to be thankful that I'm not a princess, for I should get you banished from Court for saying such things. Uncle Cyril, I am sure we ought not to keep Prince Mirkovics standing here so long."

She glanced entreatingly at her uncle, for Prince Mirkovics still maintained his deferential attitude, hat in hand, and Cyril came to the rescue. "My niece is afraid you will take cold, Prince. Pray put on your hat."

"May I be permitted to attend Madame for a short distance?" asked the old man, complying immediately with the request, and Cyril, much amused, accepted the humbler office of walking beside the bath-chair, while Mansfield, looking extremely disconsolate, attached himself to Usk.

"Ah, Princess, this is your doing!" said Cyril to the old lady. "You are certainly an inveterate match-maker. I never knew any one like you."

"Why, what have I done?" asked Princess Soudaroff, with great simplicity. "I thought the Ludwigsbad waters might do me good, and therefore I came here. Could I leave Phil and her brother behind, when their parents had entrusted them to my care?"

"Perhaps you had heard that the Ludwigsbad water is meat and drink in one, and thought you might economise, eh, Princess? Have you been spending your whole year's income in advance on your charities, as usual?"

"No, no. The fact is, poor Phil seemed so painfully interested in Ludwigsbad and your letters, that I thought the waters would—would do me no harm, and so we are here."

"The truth at last, Princess! Confession is good for the soul."

"I like the look of the young man," remarked the Princess confidentially. "Of course I have heard a great deal about him already from Usk, but I was anxious to see him. And he is your secretary, Lord Cyril? And you are engaged in bringing about the restoration of the Jews to their own land? What a wonderful age this is of ours, and what a privilege for you to be allowed to assist in such a work! I can't tell you how thankful it makes me that I have been allowed to live long enough to witness this crowning fulfilment of prophecy."

"I must introduce my friend Goldberg to you if he comes here," said Cyril. "You and he both take that view of things."

"I have already had some correspondence with the Chevalier Goldberg on the subject of relief for the Scythian Jews. Ah, how sad it is that my own country should take the lead in ill-treating God's ancient people! Is it true that Scythia is even now resisting your measures for releasing them from bondage?"

"Scythia is undoubtedly doing her best to spoil our plans at Czarigrad."

"Lord Cyril, a thought has struck me." The old lady sat upright suddenly. "I am expecting Vladimir Alexandrovitch here in a day or two. You know that he manages my affairs, and is anxious to consult me about some investment. When I told him I should be at Ludwigsbad, he said that would suit him quite well."

"Prince Soudaroff is coming here?"

"Yes, merely on this business of mine, as I said. But he is an honourable, fair-minded man. Why should you not meet him informally and talk things over? You could put the case for the Jews fully before him—men in his position are always surrounded by people whose interest it is to keep the truth from them—and I am sure he would be convinced. Then he could represent the real state of affairs to the Emperor. You won't refuse to make the attempt? It may save so much delay."

"I shall be delighted to meet Prince Soudaroff whenever you like, Princess." But in his own mind Cyril was using very different language regarding the prospective visit of the great diplomatist who was so fortunate as to be brother-in-law to the unsuspecting old lady in the bath-chair.

"Then they have felt the pinch already? This is sharp work. Wily idea to cloak the object of Soudaroff's journey in this way. But I shall have to walk warily, for it's no joke to find oneself between him and her most sapient Highness of Dardania."

They had arrived at the bridge between the old and new

promenades, and he seized the opportunity to detach Prince Mirkovics from Philippa, and carry him off to his rooms, earning Mansfield's undying gratitude by deputing him to escort the ladies back to their lodgings—a gratitude which was immediately extended to the Princess when she remarked that it would be pleasant to take a turn in the Neue Wiese before returning.

"Do you know," said Philippa mysteriously, as she resumed her place beside the chair, while Mansfield unblushingly deserted Usk in order to walk with her, "I think that poor old man must be a little queer. He has been going on in the most extraordinary way, saying that I ought to be a queen, and trying to make me discontented with my humble lot in life. I told him I was perfectly happy in it, and then he said that I had inherited my father's only fault, lack of ambition, and that if father and Uncle Cyril could be mixed up together, they would make a perfect king. I told him that I thought Uncle Cyril was splendid, but that I wouldn't have father the least bit different for anything, and he said that only confirmed what he had remarked before."

"He evidently thinks it's your duty to worry father back to Thracia," laughed Usk.

"Awfully lucky for me that you don't agree with him," said Mansfield. "I should never have had a chance of coming across you in that case."

"And if you had," said Usk, "it wouldn't have done you much good. Do you think her Royal Highness the Princess Philippa would have condescended to be aware of your existence?"

"Usk! as if I should ever forget old friends, or pretend to make any difference with them!" cried Philippa indignantly.

"I am sure you never would," said Mansfield, so fervently that Usk laughed aloud, and Princess Soudaroff smiled a

placid smile. They had now reached the Königspark, and were passing one of the outlying restaurants with which it is dotted. Before the door stood three dusty travelling-carriages loaded with luggage. The drivers were refreshing themselves after the not very lengthy journey from Charlottenbad, and a number of servants, swaggering about, were displaying their liveries before the admiring eyes of the waitresses. As Princess Soudaroff and her companions passed on, they came in sight of a group of rather noisy young men, who were gathered round a table on a terrace overlooking the river, apparently recruiting their exhausted energies with the help of beverages not exactly of a temperance character. One of the drinkers, who sat by himself on one side of the table, made a remark to the rest, and the whole party turned round and stared at Philippa. The blush called up on her cheek by the fervour of Mansfield's remark changed into a flush of anger when she became aware of their rudeness, and she held her golden head very high as she addressed a studiously careless observation to Usk, but her displeasure appeared to fail of its intended effect.

"*A la belle Anglaise!*" cried the youth who had already spoken to his friends, who were now all standing up round the table, and the words were followed by the crash of broken glass as the goblets were dashed down after the toast had been drunk.

"I say, this is beyond a joke!" cried Usk angrily, but Mansfield gripped his arm, with a look that said, "We will come back and settle things when the ladies are gone indoors." Philippa was too much discomposed to observe this piece of by-play, finding it necessary to relieve her feelings by a sweeping denunciation of the manners of foreigners, in which both the young men heartily agreed with her. When Mansfield had stigmatised the unknown roisterers as a set of cads, and Usk had added that they were probably shop-walkers from Vindobona out for a

holiday, she felt better, and made haste to turn the conversation to more agreeable themes. Before very long, however, a hurried footstep became audible in the direction from which they had come, and an officer in undress uniform, catching them up, bowed profoundly to the Princess and Philippa.

"My august master, the King of Thracia, regrets deeply that the indiscreet remarks of some person in his company annoyed mademoiselle," he said, in French. "It will afford his Majesty much gratification to be permitted to offer his apologies in person later in the day."

"We are much honoured by his Majesty's solicitude, monsieur," replied Princess Soudaroff promptly, "and neither my god-daughter nor I could dream of demanding further apologies. Karl, you may go on."

And with a bow that equalled his own in courtliness, the Princess left the discomfited emissary standing in the road.

"It is nothing but a trick to discover where we are staying," she remarked to the rest, when they were out of earshot.

"I shall have something to say to that youth," said Usk, jerking his head in the direction of the distant monarch. "Wretched little whippersnapper, how can he summon up the cheek to look a Mortimer in the face?"

"No, Usk," said Philippa earnestly; "you mustn't say a word to him. It might get Uncle Cyril into fresh trouble. I suppose if the King is determined to make our acquaintance, he must; but if he does I shall let him know what I think of him."

None of the party happened to look round, or they would have perceived the disconsolate messenger following them at a discreet distance. His errand of pursuing these strangers to their hotel was not an agreeable one to him, and he hailed gladly the appearance of Prince Mirkovics, whose elaborate

salutation showed that he was acquainted with them, as a relief from the necessity. The old noble's eyes gleamed when he heard the story.

"Yes; I can tell his Majesty who the young lady is," he said, and walked on so fast that the officer could hardly keep pace with him or find breath to tell the King why he had come.

"Well, Prince; so you can tell us who it is that we have been admiring?" said King Michael, lazily erecting a pile of broken wine-glasses.

"The lady, sir, is the daughter of the Marquis Carlino, your august father's predecessor on the throne."

"The niece, then, of the excellent Count Mortimer!" said the Scythian officer who had failed in his errand.

"What does that signify, when she has such hair?" demanded King Michael. "I never saw anything like it. All these German women look washed-out beside her."

The youthful monarch posed as a connoisseur of female beauty, and his attendants murmured a respectful acquiescence in his decision. Prince Mirkovics alone did not seem to have heard it. His sombre eyes were gleaming again under their shaggy brows.

"I am glad your Majesty has enjoyed this one glimpse of the lady," he said.

"Why do you speak as though I should never see her again, Prince? I intend to make her acquaintance at the ball to-night, and I'll bet you anything you like that she gives me half a dozen dances."

"The lady does not attend public balls, sir." As he spoke Prince Mirkovics blessed secretly the strict principles in which Nadia Caerleon had brought up her daughter.

"Not go to balls? Why not?" asked the King, in unaffected astonishment.

"Possibly because her parents do not approve of the class

of person she would meet there, sir," replied Prince Mirkovics, bestowing a severe glance upon the would-be lady-killer, who looked offended.

"Oh, very well: then I shall command Count Mortimer to present her, that's all. I mean to speak to her."

"With what object, sir, if I may venture to ask?"

"Because I want to see whether she is as lively as she is handsome, of course. She ought to have plenty of fun in her, from her face."

"If your Majesty is really desirous of making the lady's acquaintance"—Prince Mirkovics was astonished and delighted by the sudden development in himself of such powers of diplomacy as he had never suspected hitherto—"surely it would be well to say nothing to Count Mortimer. As I ventured to hint just now, if his Excellency knew that you, sir, had been graciously pleased to express admiration of his niece, he would probably remove her at once from Ludwigsbad."

"Hang it! so he would," said the King peevishly. "It would be just like him."

"Perhaps, sir, without mentioning the matter to Count Mortimer, I might have the honour of making your Majesty acquainted with the lady at a little entertainment of some sort. A ball, of course, is out of the question——"

"And moreover, their Highnesses the Princess of Dardania and Princess Ludmilla could not be present," put in the Scythian officer.

The King frowned fiercely at the interrupter. "Their Highnesses have nothing whatever to do with it," he said angrily. "I make my own friends without asking their leave."

"Sir," said Prince Mirkovics, "allow me to say that Captain Roburoff is nevertheless in the right. I must be able to invite the Princess Ludmilla, at any rate, to grace the entertainment by her presence. Would a party of

pleasure to visit some object of interest meet your Majesty's wishes?"

"Anything, anything!" said the King sulkily. "Arrange it as you like, Prince; only be sure to let me know in time, so that I may make no other engagement. And see here, you must look after Princess Lida. I am not going to dangle after her all day, instead of talking to the beautiful Mortimer."

"I will do my best to arrange everything to your Majesty's taste," said Prince Mirkovics as he retired. Once out of the King's presence, a feeling of sick disgust came over the old man as he thought of the part he had played.

"That wretched boy the son of Queen Ernestine!" he muttered. "It is as well she cannot see him. And I to be plotting to give him Carlino's daughter! But that is the very thing. She has spirit and strength of mind sufficient to save him in spite of himself. And if not—if he ventured to slight her, to ill-treat her"—Prince Mirkovics's hand clenched itself involuntarily—"we would tear him from the throne, and seat her there alone. I would kill him with my own hands; but it would be worth a year or two of misery for her to have her reigning in Thracia."

After due consultation with his hotel-keeper and with the director of the baths, Prince Mirkovics sent out that evening the invitations for his picnic, and resigned himself to wait four whole days before he could do anything more. During this period, however, King Michael contrived to steal a march upon him. Cyril, to whom in righteous indignation Mansfield had borne the news of the King's extraordinary behaviour, thought it well to make a point of accompanying Princess Soudaroff and Philippa in their morning and evening promenades, and on these occasions his party invariably encountered that of the King. The first time this happened, King Michael, who had not chosen to receive Cyril when the latter called at

his hotel the day before, stopped and spoke to him with marked graciousness. The next time, becoming aware, apparently, that the ex-Premier was not alone, he desired him to present his relations, and addressed to each of them a few affable words, delivered with a *blasé* and venerable air which sat oddly upon his youthful countenance. This gave him the opportunity of seeing Philippa in a new character, for the spectacle of the sallow, weary-eyed boy, who had treated him with so much ingratitude, patronising her beloved uncle, was almost too much for her, and her blue eyes sparkled with the indignation which her close-pressed lips succeeded in restraining. Cyril was not blind to the feelings of either side, but his only comment on what he saw was to tease Philippa afterwards about her manners, which he declared to lack the repose that ought to mark the caste of Vere de Vere.

On the evening before Prince Mirkovics's picnic Cyril and Mansfield betook themselves to Princess Soudaroff's rooms to join her dinner-party, instead of dining as usual in the open air. The only other visitor present was her brother-in-law, the great Scythian diplomatist, and it was for his benefit that this formal indoor dinner had been arranged, in order that the keen eyes of Ludwigsbad might not observe his conference with Cyril. As soon as the meal was over Usk gave his arm to the Princess, Mansfield, who had received his orders beforehand, followed, nothing loth, with Philippa, and the two statesmen were left to themselves, Cyril bringing his chair to Prince Soudaroff's end of the table, and waiting for him to begin to speak. A curious visitor might have observed that when either man glanced away the eyes of the other ran searchingly over him, as though to discover some joint in his armour, but that when the two pairs of eyes met, an impenetrable veil seemed to be let down to hide the soul behind each. Prince Soudaroff raised a glass of wine critically to the light as he said—

“What are your terms, Count?”

"You desire an accommodation, then?"

Prince Soudaroff shrugged his shoulders. "What would you have? You have hedged us in so completely that we must capitulate or starve. I suppose it is understood that if we withdraw our opposition at Czarigrad you get us the loan we want on easy terms?"

"I regret to say that no money can pass until our concession is actually granted. Aid in corn you shall have to any reasonable extent."

"This is ungenerous, Count. Why such distrust of our honour?"

"It is a compliment to you, Prince. We must make things safe."

"Well, I suppose you rely on cruel necessity to bring us to our knees. But there is one indispensable condition. The proposed governor of Palestine must be an Orthodox prince."

"That is not our affair. It is for the Powers to decide."

"Nonsense, my friend! No one knows better than you how to manage the Powers. You and your syndicate can impose your will upon them in this particular as in others. Our honour forbids us to accept anything else. Our past history, the blood we have shed in the Christian cause against the infidel——"

"Let me advise you to write it off as a bad debt, Prince."

"Impossible. I dare not return to Pavelsburg without this modification. The Emperor is firm. He will risk and lose everything rather than yield the point."

"Then he must bring the Powers to see it in the same light."

"But that is impossible, I tell you. We have no means of bringing them to our side. Come, Count, we must have your help. Prince Kazimir of Dardania is our candidate—a German on the mother's side. Europe will not be irreconcilable. What can we offer you to ensure his election?"

"Unfortunately, I can't think of anything I want," drawled Cyril.

"Money—when we get it? Titles—we will make you a prince? Political power?—come, we will propose you as High Commissioner of Minoa, and you can enjoy yourself there to your heart's content."

"Thanks, Prince; it's not big enough."

"Well, if you will not accept anything for yourself, what of your family? Would you care to see your niece Queen of Thracia? Roburoff tells me that young Michael is perfectly infatuated with her."

"Unfortunately there is an obstacle, in the shape of the Princess of Dardania and her daughter."

"Oh, the Princess has failed us twice, we need not consider her. One throws away an untrustworthy tool, you know. As for the girl, we will find her another husband. Your niece would suit Michael much better—keep him well in hand and look the part, too. I have been studying her closely since I came here. She will never have the regular beauty of her mother; but her colouring is far more charming, and—Englishwoman though she is—she has not the distressing woodenness of manner which spoiled the lovely Nadia Mikhailovna in her younger days. If that girl had been brought up by a woman of the world, instead of a saintly fanatic like my sister Pauline Vassilievna, she would have taken Europe by storm. Your niece can never rival her. But then, as I say, she has dignity and good-humour and *bonhomie* such as her mother did not possess. Why, I would advise my august master to obtain her hand for the Crown Prince, but that I should despair of making her a convert to Orthodoxy."

Cyril laughed gently. "If my niece wishes to be Queen of Thracia, Prince, she will attain her object without my help. If she doesn't, nothing I could do would have any effect upon her."

"You would return to Thracia as Premier, of course."

"Thanks, but that I have already refused to do."

"Then I fear we can settle nothing," said Prince Soudaroff, rising from the table, "since I am forbidden to accept any agreement that excludes this all-important stipulation. I am returning to Pavelsburg at once, and I will take his Imperial Majesty's pleasure on the subject. Shall we join the ladies? I must make my adieux at once, or I shall not reach Charlottenbad in time for the train."

But although Prince Soudaroff's coachman was distinctly ordered, in the hearing of Cyril and Usk, to take the Charlottenbad road, he did not do so, nor did the occupant of the carriage appear to feel any alarm when he found himself being driven exactly in the opposite direction. The road which the coachman appeared to prefer led into the hills, and after a drive of about twenty minutes the carriage stopped at a small door in a park-wall, and Prince Soudaroff alighted. The door opened at his knock, and he walked briskly along the path that led from it, guided by a ray of light from a window at some distance in front. Below this window was a door, which was also opened promptly by an invisible watcher, and admitted the visitor to a passage in which was a back staircase. The man-servant who had been stationed at the door conducted him in perfect silence up the stairs, and through a small ante-room into a luxurious boudoir, in which was sitting a lady in trailing garments of black and a cap with a long black veil falling from it to the ground. She dismissed the servant with a gesture.

"Well, what is your news?" she asked imperiously of Prince Soudaroff.

"Bad, madame. The Mortimer is incorruptible."

"Then the negotiations are broken off?"

"Unfortunately, madame, we cannot afford to do that. The other side know that they have only to wait, and we must yield."

"He refuses to consent to the election of my son?"

"He will not express any preference, madame. The matter is one for the Powers, he says. You and I know that his personal assent would satisfy the Emperor, and give us all we want."

"Because it would discredit him with the Jews when it came out?"

"Either that, madame, or it would so revolt the Catholic powers that they would combine to oblige Roum to refuse the concession, and he would lose his prestige. When the Jews reject him, he cannot sink much lower. Perhaps Hayti would afford the only possible field for his powers."

The Princess of Dardania smiled gently at the brutal joke. "Then the affair resolves itself once more into a personal contest between Count Mortimer and myself," she said. "You will let me know anything of moment that occurs to you, and I will turn my thoughts to winning the assent which is either to ruin our friend's influence or discredit his cause, or both."

"The task could not be in abler hands, madame. Perhaps I might venture to offer one single suggestion? I hear rumours that the Mortimer is aiming at the throne of Thracia for his niece."

"Ah, he wishes her to supplant my daughter?"

"Exactly so, madame. The presumption of the idea is atrocious, but it occurs to me that it might prove useful. It might be possible to lead him on by its means. For instance, from an incautious remark he let drop, it seems to me that his Majesty must have made overtures to him, with the view of inducing him to return to Thracia. That opens up dangerous possibilities, but it also gives us some idea how to set to work."

"I see." The Princess sat with her black brows drawn together.

"And now, madame, I will depart, if your Royal Highness

will permit me. It would not look well to lose my train after starting in such excellent time. You wished me to convey a letter to the Emperor, I believe?"

The Princess unlocked her writing-case, and took out a sealed envelope, which Prince Soudaroff placed in an inner pocket. Kissing the hand which the Princess extended to him, he took his leave, and quitted the villa with the same precautions as he had observed on entering it. His carriage was waiting for him under the wall of the park, and he was quickly embarked on the long drive necessary to bring him to Charlottenbad and the train.

CHAPTER V.

THE CROWN MATRIMONIAL.

It was with a sardonic chuckle that Prince Mirkovics remarked the next morning to his pretty German daughter-in-law, whom he had summoned by telegraph from Thracia to assist him upon this momentous occasion, that the entertainment he was offering to his future Queen was favoured with Queen's weather. The irony underlying the speech was necessarily lost upon Princess Boris, to whom Princess Lida of Dardania was the only possible Queen for Thracia, but she responded with sympathetic cheerfulness, relieved to be able to display her new Félix gown without offering it up as a sacrifice to her loyalty. The locality of the picnic had cost Prince Mirkovics much anxious thought, but he had fixed at last upon a spot known as the Tannenspitze, a grassy hill-top emerging from a sea of pines, and commanding an extensive view. Carriages were to convey the party from Ludwigsbad to the foot of the hill, but the summit itself could only be approached on foot, by means of a variety of intricate paths through the pine-woods, and this it was that rendered the place specially suitable in view of Prince Mirkovics's purposes. The arrangements generally were left in the hands of Princess Boris, who was dominated by the ambition of giving the smartest picnic Ludwigsbad had ever seen. This necessitated an expenditure at which the frugal soul of her father-in-law

rose in shocked revolt, but he remembered in time the stakes for which he was playing, and held his peace.

In spite of the magnitude of the preparations for their entertainment, the list of those invited was rather select than lengthy. The guest of the day was naturally Princess Lida, a young lady of seventeen, endowed with a tact and assurance that would have done credit to a world-worn society leader of seventy. It pleased her Highness, who may or may not have received a hint from her mother before starting, to single out Philippa as the object of her special favour, and enlist her as her inseparable companion for the day. Philippa must sit beside her in the carriage, and walk with her through the pine-woods, and give detailed answers to an endless list of searching questions as to her home life, her favourite pursuits, her tastes, and her ancestry. The easy persistence with which Princess Lida imposed her will upon the whole party, and her stamp upon the conversation, astonished and oppressed the English girl, who felt herself overgrown and unfinished and badly dressed in the presence of this very self-possessed young lady. The only misgiving which had afflicted Philippa on starting, relative to her gown of white cloth, with its edging of gold cord, and pale blue silk shirt, was the fear that something darker would be more suitable for a rough country walk. Now, however, as she contemplated Princess Lida's delicate silver-grey silk and black lace, and the marvellous confection of *pervenche* cashmere, decked in bewildering fashion with velvet bows, diamond buttons, iridescent embroidery, and silk fringe, which Princess Boris had considered fitting wear for the occasion, she owned to herself that the dress she had worn at the Marlborough House garden-party, a few weeks back, would not have been at all too smart. A miserable consciousness of her shoes also oppressed her, for they were English-made and serviceable, and contrasted painfully with the fairy-like foot-gear, high-heeled and highly decorated, of the other ladies.

When the carriages had been left behind, however, and the walk through the woods began, Philippa found that the advantage was on her own side, but she thought Prince Mirkovics need not have emphasised this superiority in the way he did. Noticing the difficulty with which Princess Lida stumbled along the rough track, he devoted himself ostentatiously to removing the stones from her path, accompanying his attentions with remarks which the two girls were fain to regard as breathing loyalty and respect, but which seemed fated to move King Michael and his suite to bursts of ill-concealed laughter. It was a relief to Philippa when their host insisted at last on offering his arm to the Princess, and provided a cavalier for herself in the shape of Captain Roburoff, who appeared to have altogether forgotten and forgiven the snub he had received only five days ago at her godmother's hands. He spoke of Cyril and his efforts to solve the Jewish problem with so much interest and appreciation that Philippa, unconscious that a word from Prince Soudaroff had led him to read up the subject carefully, felt her heart warm towards him, and conversed with an animation such as she rarely showed to strangers.

Cyril himself was unable to spare time for the picnic, which caused Prince Mirkovics a secret guilty satisfaction, but he had generously given Mansfield a day's holiday, which had so far failed to bring the secretary the pleasure he had expected. Philippa's society was unattainable, and in despair Mansfield attached himself to another disconsolate young Englishman, who knew no one but the friends with whom he had come. Together they forsook the beaten track in favour of a torrent-bed, which afforded them a good deal of scrambling and a certain amount of risk, arousing thereby the longing envy of Usk, who had been delivered over to the tender mercies of Princess Lida's lady-in-waiting. Countess Birnsdorf was stiff, elderly, and unappreciative of rural delights, and she subjected Usk to a severe cross-examination, with the view of

discovering whether he was really "born," in the German sense of the word. His light-hearted confession that he really could not answer half her questions without looking up his family history in the 'Peerage' shocked and startled her, and he detected a perceptible shrinking from his society until she had satisfied herself as to the length of time the Mortimers had reigned at Llandiarmid, and the arms they had borne at different epochs. Early study of the carvings and stained glass in the Castle hall had rendered Usk well versed in these, and before the hill-top was reached, the Countess had come to look upon him almost with friendliness. The feeling was not reciprocated, however, and Usk was base enough to turn his charge over to Mansfield's unhappy friend, who had in some way contrived to lose his companion in the wood, and approached to ask whether Usk had seen him. Quieting his conscience with the excuse that it would be quite a novel and exciting sensation for the Countess to talk for the first time to some one who was not "born," Usk slipped away to find Mansfield, whom he discovered engaged in a solitary search for adventures in the miniature cavern where the stream took its rise. In this Usk joined him, and they wasted all the vestas they had with them, made themselves decidedly wet, and tore their clothes a little, enjoying themselves thoroughly the while. When the want of matches rendered further exploration impracticable, they remembered reluctantly their duty to the rest of the party, and were retracing their steps to the summit of the hill, when there was a flash of blue and white through the trees, and the two young men were suddenly confronted by Philippa, who burst upon them, flushed and panting.

"Usk," she cried fiercely, "if you let that odious little cad come near me again, I'll never speak another word to you in my life!"

"Which I wish to remark, that your language is strong, Phil," observed Usk mildly.

Mansfield's eyes blazed as he turned upon him. "For shame, Usk! Doesn't it matter to you that your sister has been insulted? Who is it, Lady Phil? that Scythian fellow?"

"No, no," panted Philippa, "it's the King. But Usk is quite right. It was silly of me to be so excited. Oh, please, Mr Mansfield, don't go. I—I want you to hear how it was. Please stay here."

She caught his hand and held it, and Mansfield, before whose eyes had floated a vision in which his stick made closer acquaintance with King Michael's sacred person than the monarch would be likely to consider agreeable, allowed himself to be persuaded to remain, more especially since Usk gave him a warning look behind Philippa's back. "This is my affair. You have no right to interfere," the look meant, and Mansfield was forced to submit.

"I suppose they must have arranged it beforehand," Philippa went on, "for you know, Usk, I was walking with Captain Roburoff. He talked so nicely about Uncle Cyril, and told me such interesting things about the Jews in Scythia, that I never thought about the path until he stopped suddenly, and said, 'A thousand pardons, made-moiselle! What a fool I am! I have lost the way,' and then I found that none of the others were in sight, and I could not hear their voices either. Captain Roburoff seemed dreadfully sorry, and asked me to sit down on a fallen tree while he went on a little farther to see where the path led to. I said I was not tired, but he persisted I must be, and I thought he would fancy that I was afraid to stay in the wood alone, so I sat down. He was out of sight among the trees almost at once, and it really was rather lonely, so that I was quite glad when I heard him coming back, as I thought. But it wasn't Captain Roburoff at all, it was the King, and he said he had flown to the relief of the distressed damsel, and talked a lot of nonsense about wood-nymphs, and tried

to pay me compliments about—about my hair, you know, and that sort of thing. I nearly laughed, but I thought it might be his way of being polite, so I walked on with him. Then we came to a rather steep place, and he would insist on helping me up it (though I believe I could have helped him much better), and he squeezed my hand. I pulled it away at once, and he said, in the most idiotic way, ‘Would that I might call that fair hand mine for ever!’ I thought that was going rather far, even for a foreigner, so I made some remark about Princess Lida, just to recall her to his mind. Then he flew out and said that he hated Princess Lida, that his mother and the Princess of Dardania had arranged the marriage when he was a baby, and had brought him up to look upon it as a settled thing, and that Princess Lida had no soul, and not a thought in common with him, and he was tired of her very name, and he would be graciously pleased to marry me instead. Fancy—a boy years younger than I am! He had got sentimental again by that time, but I was so angry that I gave him a good talking-to, and told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and that Princess Lida was perfectly lovely, and would make him a far better queen than he had any right to expect, and then he went into such a passion! I think he must have expected me to regard his offer as a sort of command, to be obeyed without question, for he said that the Princess of Dardania and her daughter were the curse of Thracia, and that it would be my fault if the kingdom was ruined and he went to the bad. I wanted to box his ears, and at last I was really afraid I should, for he was just like a little boy who ought to be put in a corner, so I came away. Usk, do you think he was mad—or *drunk*?” Philippa ended the story of her wrongs in an awestruck whisper.

“Don’t know, I am sure. I shall speak to him and see.”

“No, Usk, you’d better not. You know father told us to

be sure to consult Uncle Cyril at once if the slightest attempt was made to entangle us in politics while we were abroad, and I suppose this must be the sort of thing he meant."

"Would you like me to tell Count Mortimer when I see him to-night, Lady Phil?" asked Mansfield. A horrible suspicion had seized him that Cyril might have some hand in the affair. He hated himself for the thought, but his short intercourse with his employer had served to assure him that over-scrupulousness was not one of Cyril's failings. If he was indeed in King Michael's confidence, and Philippa discovered the fact, the enthusiastic love she cherished for her uncle would be destroyed for ever, and Mansfield made up his mind to spare her the pain of such a disillusionment.

"Oh no," she answered, flushing scarlet. "I could not let any one else tell him about such a horrid thing. I must do it myself."

"I would make as little of it as possible," said Mansfield, with assumed unconcern. "I shall see him before you do, that's all."

"Oh yes, please tell him, then. Perhaps he might say we ought not to have lost time. But you won't leave me alone all afternoon, Usk, will you? or if Usk is called away, you'll stay with me, won't you, Mr Mansfield?"

Mansfield assured her of his constant attendance with a warmth that drew another warning look from Usk, and they returned to the rest of the party, who were all somewhat ruffled, owing to the obvious ill-temper of King Michael. He was seated between his *fiancée* and Princess Boris, doing his best to make both ladies uncomfortable, and the appearance of Philippa with her bodyguard produced no improvement in his mood, since all Prince Mirkovics's tactics failed to separate the three. Even when Princess Lida claimed Philippa again after lunch as her companion, Usk and Mansfield followed the two girls at a discreet distance, much to the disapproval of the lady-in-waiting, who sus-

pected in them a romantic adoration for her charge. By affecting an abnormal denseness, and complete ignorance of the French language, they succeeded in baffling their host's efforts to detach them from Philippa, and when they returned to Ludwigsbad in the evening they were able to boast that King Michael had not ventured to approach her again. Mansfield saw Usk and his sister safely deposited at Princess Soudaroff's lodgings, and returned reluctantly to the Hôtel Waldthier to tell his story to Cyril. He could not bring himself to look at his employer during the recital, for the fear which had seized him at first had become almost a certainty, and it was with a shock of anticipation rather than surprise that he heard Cyril say—

"So soon? The young rascal has lost no time, certainly."

"Count, you didn't know of this?" The agony of entreaty in his own voice startled Mansfield.

"May I ask what business it is of yours?"

"I couldn't—I can't believe it. Some one told me once that you spared no one when it was a question of politics, but I can't believe you would expose your own niece to unpleasantness simply to further your schemes."

"A Daniel come to judgment! The unpleasantness was soon over, on your own showing."

"It would not have been in the case of any other girl. It might have led her into awful trouble. Lady Phil is different. She would not let herself be tempted by a crown."

"In view of your position with regard to my brother's family," remarked Cyril icily, "your interference in this affair is open to objection."

Mansfield's accusing eyes fell, but he recovered himself quickly. "I can't deny that I love Lady Phil, Count; but that doesn't deprive me of the right a man has to help any girl that he may see placed in an unfair position."

"And what is the exact nature of the help you propose to render?"

"To resign my post with you, and telegraph to Lord Caerleon. Lady Phil shall never hear the full truth, if I can help it. I think it would break her heart to know that you——"

Mansfield's voice faltered, and Cyril's keen eyes scrutinised him curiously.

"Do you know that you are a fool, Mansfield?—an honest, blundering idiot? I won't accept your resignation, do you hear?—though I should be justified in doing so, after the way you have spoken to me. How dare you expect me to defend myself against your suspicions? You know you had given me up as a bad lot. Well, all I knew of the matter was a hint last night from Prince Soudaroff that young Michael had fallen in love with my niece, but I refused to have anything to do with it. And even now I know that you trust me no further than you can see me."

"Forgive me, Count. If you knew how I hated the thought——"

"I should grovel before you in mingled pity and admiration, no doubt. But why I should care a farthing about your opinion of me I don't know. I have never defended myself to any one before, but you are really too young and idyllic for this wicked world. Well, you may be easy about my niece. I will put a stop to King Michael's love-making."

Mansfield's mind was in a whirl as he departed. He had not known hitherto what power Cyril possessed over him, nor with what mastery he could play upon his feelings; but he felt now that if he had found his employer guilty of the baseness he had suspected in him, it would have been a blow second only to the loss of Philippa herself. The unworthiness of his late suspicions cut him to the heart, and his whole demeanour the next day was a mute entreaty for pardon, which amused Cyril not a little. Even an incident which would have aroused his misgivings the day before had now no power to disturb his trust.

The early promenade and the open-air breakfast were over, and tranquillity had settled down upon the place for the space of those morning hours which Ludwigsbad holds sacred to rest and seclusion. At the Hôtel Waldthier Mansfield sat writing in the little anteroom of Cyril's *appartement*, whence he could command the side-door which was reserved for Count Mortimer's visitors. Many strange guests had Mansfield admitted at that door, from royal princes to poverty-stricken Jews, but it was startling even to him to observe a stage conspirator approaching it. The visitor wore a soft felt hat pulled down over his face, and a greatcoat with the collar turned up—an attire singularly unsuited to the weather,—and he glanced from side to side, starting at the slightest sound, in a very realistic manner. After stepping noiselessly up to the door, and apparently satisfying himself that he was unobserved, he returned on tiptoe to the gateway by which he had entered the garden, and brought back with him another person attired like himself. Together they approached Mansfield's window, and the first man made signs expressive of a desire to enter without attracting attention. Leaving his desk, Mansfield admitted them at the private door. They entered without uttering a word, but, once in the room, the second turned down his collar and disclosed the features of King Michael.

"Are we alone, and unobserved?" he demanded of his companion.

"Absolutely so, my liege," returned Captain Roburoff, in accents that suggested a certain difficulty in speaking. The King turned majestically to Mansfield, who half expected to hear himself addressed as "Minion."

"Tell Count Mortimer that I wish to see him," he said.

"I will inquire whether his Excellency is at leisure, sir," responded Mansfield, who would have given much to deny the monarch admittance altogether. But although Cyril raised his eyebrows quizzically, and asked whether Mansfield

would wish to be present during the interview, he rose at once and came to the door to welcome his royal visitor.

"To what am I indebted for this supreme honour, sir?" he inquired when they were alone.

"Be seated, Count," replied King Michael affably. "I am here on a friendly errand, I assure you."

Cyril bowed and obeyed, and his visitor continued—

"I perceive, Count, that you are surprised by this private visit. No doubt it will surprise you still more to learn that it is merely an earnest of my good-will towards you. I admit that when I came to the throne I acted hastily in accepting your resignation, but no one can regret it more than I do. I look to you, as a fair-minded man, to place the blame where it is due. My mind had been poisoned against you—by whom, you can guess."

Cyril bowed again in silence. King Michael went on—

"I have made up my mind to redress the injustice into which I was hurried. In their eagerness to aggrandise their own family, my mother and the Princess of Dardania induced me to engage myself to Princess Ludmilla, and by means of this quasi-promise the Princess of Dardania has contrived to exercise a wholly unwarranted authority over myself and the kingdom. I have determined to put an end to it. The Princess's influence is injurious to Thracia, and her daughter is personally distasteful to myself. The position which she hopes to occupy I destine for your niece, Lady Philippa Mortimer, and I desire your assistance in the matter."

"Well?" interjected Cyril, with startling suddenness.

"I think you forget to whom you are speaking, Count."

"No, sir. I do not forget that for the sake of the girl you now wish to cast aside you broke the heart of the mother who had sacrificed her life's happiness for you and your kingdom."

The King's sallow face grew livid. "If all that is said is true, you are not the man to talk to me of cruelty to her Majesty, Count."

"At least I can say that I have repented my cruelty from that day to this. You have not." Cyril's eyes were flashing, and his even voice was charged with thunder. King Michael and he had both risen to their feet, and were confronting each other angrily across the table.

"We are losing time in these irrelevant recriminations, Count," said the King, recovering himself. "I wish you to undertake the conduct of this affair. You will return to office, of course—I give you *carte blanche* with regard to the wretched crew of incapables at present in power—but I do not know whether you will prefer to rid me of the Princess of Dardania and her daughter before setting to work. I leave the method to you—you are an old enemy of her Royal Highness, I believe?—and I don't stipulate for any special tenderness towards either of them. Afterwards you will take the proper steps to obtain Lady Philippa's hand for me. I believe I alarmed the young lady yesterday by avowing my sentiments too openly; no doubt she thought such warmth incorrect in view of Princess Lida's presence in the company; but you will do everything in due form. You hesitate? You think I am making a cat's paw of you?" A grim smile crossed Cyril's face. "I am willing to repeat before witnesses the orders I have given you, if you will call in Roburoff and your secretary."

"Quite unnecessary." Cyril had regained his usual calm. "You broke the heart of the woman who gave up everything for you, and now you want to throw away the toy for the sake of which you did it. But that you won't do. I don't pose as a moralist, but I have some sense of the fitness of things. At the rate you are going, it won't be long before you are unfit to speak to a decent woman, and you expect me to give you my niece! Why, I should have scruples about marrying you to Princess Lida, if I had any responsibility in the matter, but her mother and you settled that between you, and you shall stick to it. If

I am not mistaken, she will turn out a match for you. But at any rate, for your mother's sake, I will see that her wishes on the subject are carried out."

The fierce irony of the tone roused the King to something very like frenzy. "If I don't marry your niece, I'll make you sorry that you refused her to me," he muttered, his lips twitching and his fingers picking nervously at his chin.

"The first word you say against her will be the signal for your own destruction," said Cyril coldly. "I am not in the habit of speaking idly, and I warn you that you are still on the throne only because I have not cared to dethrone you. But if you are good enough to furnish me with a reason for taking action——"

"I don't revenge myself upon women," snarled the King, forgetting his threat of the moment before.

"Ah, you are young yet," replied Cyril pleasantly. "Permit me to attend your Majesty to the door."

In the anteroom Captain Roburoff, who had been amusing himself with trying to torment Mansfield by means of hints as to the King's matrimonial intentions, jumped up in a hurry when his sovereign appeared. He expected a return to the elaborate ceremonial which had marked their entrance into the hotel, but King Michael strode out of the room without a word, neglecting all the precautions he had seen fit to adopt, and Mansfield breathed freely. It was evident that here was no accepted lover, and the refusal appeared to have been accompanied by a little wholesome plain speaking. On Cyril the impression left by the interview was one of unmitigated disgust.

"*That* Ernestine's boy!" he muttered, as Prince Mirkovics had done before him. "Well, it's a good thing that the young blackguard forgot himself so far as to threaten poor little Phil. It forces me to make things safe by cutting the ground from under his feet. So now to business!"

CHAPTER VI.

DANAOS DONA FERENTES.

TELLING Mansfield that he was going for a stroll, and should probably lunch at Princess Soudaroff's—a piece of information that filled the secretary with unavailing envy—Cyril took the road which led to the villa occupied by the Princess of Dardania. Reaching the door, he was greeted with stares of surprise by the servants on the steps and in the hall, and his request to be permitted to wait upon the Princess was regarded with amazement, not unmixed with suspicion.

“Her Royal Highness does not receive visitors,” he was told, while his card was handed round and scrutinised with something of awe.

“I think her Royal Highness will receive me,” he answered calmly, wishing he was as sure of the fact as he pretended to be. No one knew better than he did that he was making a hazardous stroke. If it failed, his old enemy would have scored a point. But his confident air impressed the servants sufficiently to induce them to carry his name to the Princess, and her reception of it established him in their respect. Princess Ottilie was beginning to be anxious about the fulfilment of her compact with Prince Soudaroff. Two days had passed since his visit, and she had made no progress towards securing the coveted governorship for her son. Worse than this, there seemed to be no means even of

sounding Cyril upon the subject, unless she went so far as to make direct advances, such as he would probably take delight in repulsing. Not knowing that she had become necessary to his schemes, she had never dared to hope that the first overtures would come from him, and the announcement that he asked to see her was music in her ears. She gave orders that he should be admitted at once, and when he was ushered into her boudoir he found her standing beside the table to receive him, a majestic figure in her sweeping black robes. Why was it that Cyril's heart flew straightway to another woman who had worn similar weeds, which, so far from enhancing such beauty as she possessed, had only served to accentuate the slenderness of her form and deprive her of every vestige of colour? The Princess of Dardania looked more magnificent even than of old, the severity of the garb exhibiting her stately stature to the fullest advantage.

"A year ago," she said, "I should have hesitated to receive Count Mortimer, fearing that he came as an enemy; but now"—her eyes strayed to the large portrait of her late husband which stood upon the table—"I cannot believe that he would seek my presence with the desire of adding to my misfortunes."

"Indeed, madame, my sole reason for entreating an audience is the double hope of doing you a service and of obtaining a favour from you."

"Tell me the last first, Count, that I may at any rate have the pleasure of granting it."

"It grows out of the first, madame, and I will therefore ask permission to defer it for a moment. Your Royal Highness will recollect that when we last met I had the misfortune to differ from you with regard to the affairs of Thracia?"

The Princess remembered Prince Soudaroff's hint, and trembled in spite of herself. Had her old enemy come

to announce the downfall of her dearest hopes? She inclined her head slightly in answer to the question, but said nothing.

"You favoured a certain policy, madame, which I opposed. Your advice prevailed. I bowed to circumstances, and quitted Thracia. I have now no wish to disturb the settlement then arrived at, although I think your Royal Highness will perceive presently that I could easily do so."

"I don't understand you, Count. Pray do not speak in riddles."

"To speak plainly, madame, the King of Thracia has been seized with a violent—we will hope only evanescent—passion for my niece."

"Surely you forget that his Majesty is betrothed to my daughter, Count?"

"Say rather, madame, that his Majesty has forgotten it, since this morning he directed me to make formal proposals to my brother for his daughter's hand."

"Oh, really, Count, this is too absurd! His Majesty must be out of his mind."

"The derangement is merely temporary, madame. My niece regards it in that light, I assure you. She was horrified by the King's proposal."

"I congratulate you on the good sense of the young lady, Count."

"I am indeed to be congratulated, madame; but I can see that this vexatious affair may have disagreeable consequences, of which my niece does not dream. I understand that at the picnic yesterday his Majesty made her unpleasantly conspicuous by his attentions. Her natural impulse is to leave Ludwigsbad immediately; but such a flight would only cause the sensation we wish to avoid. You acknowledge, madame, that Lady Philippa has behaved well, you have honoured her parents with your friendship—you must see that there is only one means of averting such gossip as would be equally painful to you and to them."

The Princess's countenance cleared. "Have you heard, Count, that my daughter hurt her foot yesterday, and is condemned to the sofa for several days? She has conceived a romantic attachment for your pretty niece, and it would cheer her to have her society. Do you think Lady Philippa's excellent godmother would spare her to us for a week? If so, I will send Countess Birnsdorf to bring her here."

"I feel sure that Princess Soudaroff will rejoice to sacrifice herself on Princess Lida's behalf, madame. The King, of course——"

"The King is about to join a shooting-party in the mountains. I heard the news just before you came."

"That removes my sole anxiety, madame. Your Royal Highness will condescend to accept my thanks for your great kindness?"

"Wait, Count. There is something I wish to say. Do you remember telling me that if I tried to rule the Balkans without your help I should fail? It is true; I have proved it. But who could have imagined that it would be the ingratitude and disobedience of my own children which would bring about the fulfilment of your prophecy?"

"You have my sincerest sympathy, madame."

"My eldest daughter, as you know, is married to King Albrecht of Moesia. I thought him all I could desire; he seemed thoroughly in sympathy with my schemes; but no sooner was he married than he became a German of the Germans, and Bettine followed his example. Thus I lost Moesia from my Slavonic confederation. But with my son it was even worse. You know, of course, that he was to marry the Grand-Duchess Sonya Eugenovna. Her mother has long been dead, and she spent much of her time with me. All seemed to go well between her and Alexis; but shortly before his father died, when I wished him to propose to her, he refused flatly. He had met Princess Emilia of Magnagrecia at the Pannonian Court, and declared that he

would marry no one else. In vain I pointed out the disgrace he was bringing upon me; he married Princess Emilia a month ago; and now I am only welcome in Dardania, as in Moesia, on sufferance. Surely even you must pity me?"

"Madame," interposed Cyril, in tones of deep emotion, "your gracious confidence forces me to speak. The idea of detaching your son from the Grand-Duchess Sonya, and attracting him to the lady who is now his wife, was mine."

The Princess sat as if stunned. She had known the truth perfectly well, and Cyril was aware of this. It was his confession that took her by surprise. "You have made amends by your chivalrous action to-day," she said at last, with a sad smile.

"Your kindness overwhelms me, madame. Have I your Highness's permission to retire? I know my presence must be distasteful."

"No; there is something else you can do, Count. I have another son, and I have set my heart on his becoming governor of Palestine. That is in your power to bring about."

"Alas, madame! Why ask me the one impossible thing? The decision does not rest with me, nor even with my friends."

The Princess smiled more gently still. "I must take the will for the deed, I suppose?" she said. "That is poor comfort for an anxious mother, Count. But don't think I blame you. You will come here occasionally when your niece is with us, and assure yourself that we are taking proper care of her? We need not sadden the young with the knowledge of our troubles. Come as often as you like, and do not feel compelled to ask for me. I cannot forget that I am growing old."

"Then, madame, you succeed where all the rest of the world has failed," responded Cyril, kissing the beautiful hand she held out to him. His manner was remorseful, and his eyes lingered on her face as he left the room. As soon as

he was gone, the Princess crossed the floor to a large mirror.

"He was more nearly human than I have ever known him," she mused. "What can it be?" She smiled consciously as her eyes fell upon the reflection in the glass. "Would it be possible? What a triumph! to have him at my feet! But he is dangerous; I dare not trust him. There is Ernestine, too; I must sound him on that subject. That will give me some clue to his present feelings. He is open to conviction on the subject of Kazimir, I think; but even that would be nothing in comparison with the joy of snatching him from Ernestine. But I must not think of that. I must keep cool. If he once gets the upper hand, all is lost. I am glad I thought of giving him a general invitation. Ah, Birnsdorf," as the lady-in-waiting appeared at the door, "I want you to take one of the carriages, and go to Princess Soudaroff's lodgings. You will carry a note from me, and bring back Lady Philippa Mortimer. Impress upon the old fanatic that Lida is making herself ill for want of the girl, and say anything else that occurs to you as likely to weigh with her."

Countess Birnsdorf curtsayed and retired, and executed her mission with so much success that Philippa returned with her to the villa within an hour. Cyril had prepared Princess Soudaroff's mind for the request, and the Countess worked skilfully upon her feelings; hence the easy victory.

The week of Philippa's stay at the villa—a stay which she discovered to be intended as a reward for what Countess Birnsdorf called the "delicate correctness" of her conduct—was not a period of unmixed bliss. The house and grounds were beautiful, and the etiquette exacted by the Princess not excessive, but the atmosphere was new and disagreeable to Philippa. The air seemed full of plots, every one appeared to be playing a part, and the unreality oppressed her, while her

usual home remedy for bad spirits, a brisk ride or a long ramble over the hills, was unattainable. She complained afterwards that she never had a chance of blowing the cobwebs away, restricted as she was to stately promenades with Countess Birnsdorf, or funereal drives in a closed carriage with the Princess. Nor were her troubles wholly physical. Her father's wisdom in declining a crown, and preferring England to the Continent as a residence, commended itself to her more and more when she told herself that even she, placed in Princess Lida's circumstances, might have learned to share her views of right and wrong. Princess Lida, she found, had fallen deeply in love, not with King Michael, but with a gentleman occupying an official position of some sort, to whose identity she gave no clue, intending, possibly, that Philippa should elicit it by means of cross-examination. But Philippa was disappointing. She was as much shocked as the Princess could desire, but not so much at the existence of the attachment as at the fact that it was not intended to lead to anything more. She listened with but slight interest to Princess Lida's vivacious enumeration of the various artifices by which she and her lover contrived to carry on their flirtation under the very noses of the Princess of Dardania and Countess Birnsdorf, and she interrupted the history of a certain Court ball, at which the pair had succeeded in exchanging notes, by the question—

“But what do you mean to do about him?”

“Do? What is there to be done? I suppose we shall simply go on.”

“But you can't intend to marry King Michael when you care for this other man?”

“Of course I do. It has been arranged for me.”

“What does that signify? It would be wrong.”

“Oh, you English, with your right and wrong! I don't trouble my head with all that. I take my pleasure as it comes.”

"But you would be miserable, married to a man you didn't love."

"Oh, the good Philippa is trying to persuade me to run away with the other! I must tell mamma. She little thinks what a serpent she has welcomed into her home, to poison the innocent mind of her child! But you mistake me, my Lippchen. The misery would be if I married the other. I want jewellery and Paris gowns and a gay Court, not love in a four-roomed flat. One of the Pannonian Archduchesses has tried that. She comes to the Schloss (only to family gatherings, of course) in a common cab, and makes her own dresses, I believe. Can you imagine my doing that sort of thing?"

"I never thought of advising you to run away," said Philippa indignantly, "and if you are only thinking of what you can get, you had certainly better not try it. But you could remain unmarried. That would be better than——"

"Than marrying the King? Thank you, Lippchen! It's quite clear that you don't know the sort of life a Princess leads if she doesn't happen to marry. No position, no independence, patronised and pushed aside by her relations, obliged to become a dowdy old devotee through sheer terror of scandal, for there is no mercy for any one who is remotely suspected of a tendency to disgrace the house. A convent or a fortress, there's your choice! No, I shall marry King Michael and keep him in order, at any rate in public, and we will have the gayest Court in Europe. Oh, you may trust me to keep up appearances when I have got the reality."

Philippa was too much disgusted to answer, and Princess Lida, turning restlessly on her couch, broke into a laugh at the sight of her disapproving face.

"You are too delightfully innocent, Lippchen! But, after all, I am in the right. My mother has brought me up, educated me, trained me, with the sole intention of my making this marriage. You would not have me disappoint

her—and myself? Is that how you intend to treat your parents when they present your future husband to you?”

“People don’t do that in England,” with dignity.

“Not among the lower orders, I know, but you are ‘highly well-born,’ as we say in German. Let us imagine an instance.” Princess Lida raised herself on her elbow. “Suppose that secretary of your uncle’s declared to you that he had conceived a passion for you”—she watched with delight the flood of crimson which overspread Philippa’s face at this rude handling of the secret, the existence of which she had scarcely owned even to herself—“and you were not insensible to it——”

“You have no right whatever to say such things!” cried Philippa, finding her tongue.

“But, my Lippchen,” with extreme simplicity, “no one could have seen the poor young man in your society the other day without perceiving what his feelings were. Your response I am only imagining for the sake of argument. Well, your parents declare the idea preposterous, and inform you that you have been destined all your life for some elderly red-faced provincial nobleman. What will you do?”

“Of course I would never marry any one without my father’s consent. But I should ask him to tell me his objections, and I know he would treat me as a reasonable being. Perhaps he might change his mind after a time, but if not, I should go on just as I was. He would never try to make me marry any one else.”

“Oh, you are too good, you and your parents!” cried Princess Lida, as Philippa, her fair face crimson, put forth her defence like a defiance; “but I have not such a considerate mother, and mamma has not such an easily contented daughter. You see, the game would not be worth the candle in my case.”

“That means you don’t love the other one well enough to give up anything for his sake?”

"Exactly. I want to keep what I have, and to get all I can. Meanwhile, I enjoy myself—quite decorously and without hurting any one."

"But surely you are hurting him?"

"How? Oh, you mean if it came out. But I shan't let it out, you see, nor will he, for he is far too comfortable in his present post, just as I am. Why shouldn't I amuse myself like every one else? Mamma will have her train of adorers as soon as she receives people again. Even now she has your beloved uncle."

"Princess!" Philippa's cry was a passionate contradiction.

Princess Lida laughed. "Why, poor innocent Lippchen, you don't imagine that Count Mortimer comes here every day to see you? It is my mother who is the attraction, not his dutiful niece. What! have I broken another idol?"

For Philippa had sprung up with an inarticulate exclamation and rushed out of the room. The sting of the accusation lay in the fact that her reason assured her of its truth. It was not to see her that Cyril paid his daily visits to the villa, passing on invariably from the large drawing-room into the boudoir beyond, there to pay his respects to the Princess. These interviews were protracted far beyond the limits ordained by ceremony, and Countess Birnsdorf had felt it necessary to apologise for their length by observing to Philippa that she was quite glad to see Count Mortimer coming in, for no one else had been able to induce the Princess to forget her sorrows in conversation since her bereavement. This information Philippa had received with a certain reserve, for the Princess had not struck her as overwhelmed with grief; but she saw now that the old lady had been endeavouring to divert her mind from a suspicion that had already troubled herself. But had the idea occurred to Cyril? Could he know that the purport of his visits was thus interpreted? Surely it could only be that, impelled at first merely by the desire of cheering the

Princess, he had afterwards been attracted by the conversation of a clever and brilliant woman? At any rate, he should be warned what people were saying about him. With this resolve strong in her mind Philippa walked to the garden-gate to meet her uncle, attended only by Princess Lida's white poodle. One glance at her troubled face showed Cyril that something serious was in the air; but, in his usual teasing fashion, he talked continuously on indifferent subjects. When they came in sight of the house Philippa stopped short, in agony lest the opportunity should be lost.

"Uncle Cyril, I want to ask you something. Is the Princess a friend of yours? Usk and I always thought she had done something to injure you."

"So she did, Phil. But is it your creed that once an enemy always an enemy? No? Then you see I too can be virtuous and overlook my enemies' faults—sometimes."

"But they say—they say you want to marry her," Philippa succeeded in bringing out.

"Do they? How kind of them! Would you like the Princess for an aunt, Phil? She's a charming woman, isn't she?"

"Oh, Uncle Cyril, you wouldn't—you don't mean it?"

"Well, Phil, I have no present intention of inviting her to become your aunt. Would you like to know why? Because I am afraid she would say no, of course, and your feelings might be hurt."

They had reached the villa by this time, and Philippa was left to her own gloomy reflections. Whether her uncle was in earnest or not, it was quite clear that he had no intention of taking her into his confidence, and it did not occur to her that in the circumstances this might be rather advantageous than otherwise. The least suspicious of mortals, Philippa had not discovered that she was persistently catechised as to Cyril's future plans and his past history. The art with which the subject was approached and the questions put was

such that she had no idea of its existence, nor yet of the fact that her honest answers often caused much irritation to the questioner. Philippa knew nothing of her uncle but what he chose to tell her, together with the deductions drawn by Usk and herself from this evidence, and she could not tell more than she knew. The Princess was particularly curious as to the footing upon which Cyril now stood with Queen Ernestine. Did he keep up any communication with her, or had they parted for ever? Philippa had heard from Mansfield of Prince Mirkovics's defence of Queen Ernestine, and her prejudices were somewhat modified; but she was still firm in the belief that her uncle had been very badly treated. It was, therefore, not without satisfaction that she informed the Princess of Cyril's request, on his return from Thracia, that the Queen's name should not be mentioned in his hearing, and added that, so far as she knew, he was of the same mind still.

"And you are all considerate enough to do as he asked?" cried the Princess, with a laugh in which relief mingled with something of pique. "Why, if I were one of his family, and he had made such a request of me, I should have done nothing but tease him to find out what he really felt."

Acting, presumably, upon this principle, the Princess prepared to seek information from the best authority, since Philippa could tell her so little. When she received Cyril that afternoon, she was sad and preoccupied, and smiled only with difficulty.

"I fear you have had bad news, madame?" he suggested at last.

"Now how did you guess that?" she asked gratefully. "Yes, I have such a painful account of my cousin, Queen Ernestine, from Syria." Her fingers played carelessly with a letter bearing a Roumi stamp as she spoke. The letter was more than a year old, but Cyril was not supposed to know that.

"Her Majesty is ill, madame?" he asked, in precisely the right tone of respectful sympathy. A single glance had shown him that the letter was not black-edged, and there was no fear that any news but the worst would make him betray himself.

"No, not exactly ill; but she is subject to such strange delusions. We hoped that the change of scene might benefit her, but I fear there can be no doubt that her mind is permanently affected. Would you believe it?—she will not see a man, or allow one to approach her. You know she is residing with the Königshof deaconesses at their Institution at Brutli, in the Lebanon? Well, I hear that only her ladies and female attendants are allowed to be with her there—the gentlemen must live in the village. It is entirely her own doing, for the Institution would be quite willing to receive them, but she refuses to see even the pastor belonging to the place. Isn't it extraordinary?"

"Most extraordinary, madame."

"And she has returned to the very deepest widow's mourning, only wearing white instead of black. It almost seems," added the Princess musingly, stealing a glance at Cyril from under the hand which was shading her eyes, "as if she had had some experience which had prejudiced her against your sex."

"That seems the most probable explanation, madame. The difference with his Majesty, perhaps——"

"Oh, I don't think that would account for it; do you? No, on second thoughts I rather fancy she must be conscious of having done a great injury to some man, so that remorse drives her to this seclusion."

"It is possible, madame. There have been cases in which women have ruined the lives of men who were foolish enough to trust them."

"You speak bitterly, Count. And what, in your opinion, is the usual effect of such behaviour upon the man?"

"Simply, madame, that he determines never to place his future in the power of a woman again."

"Ah, you cherish your hatred so long, you men! We women soon grow tired of perpetual animosities. But have you ever known what it is to be so deceived, Count?"

"I have, madame."

"And—and did you come to the usual determination?"

"Madame, I thought I had—until a week ago."

The compliment was commonplace enough, but something in the tone, and in the glance which accompanied it, thrilled the heart of the Princess. Almost for the first time in her life she blushed like a girl, and she changed the subject with a haste and maladroitness that showed how deeply she was moved.

"By-the-bye, Count, I want you to tell me how your scheme is progressing. Is it true that, as I see by this morning's paper, opposition to it is springing up in England?"

"Scarcely, madame. A vexatious incident has occurred, that is all."

"Pray tell me about it. I thought you felt quite safe with regard to your own country?"

"True, madame, except for such incidents as this. Before coming here, I arranged matters with the Dowager Duchess of Old Sarum."

"The Dowager? But has she any influence in politics?"

"The Duchess, madame, like my niece's kind friend Princess Soudaroff, is a lady who takes a deep interest in the conversion of the Jews to Christianity. Fifty or sixty years ago people of her stamp believed that the Jews could only be restored to Palestine in a Christianised condition, and they founded the Jerusalem bishopric in order that the converts might find some one there to receive them. Now their views have undergone a slight change, and they think that the return to Palestine is to come first and the conversion after it. Naturally, then, they wish to hasten on the

restoration, in order that the second desirable event may follow as quickly as possible. Before leaving England I had a long confidential talk with the Duchess, laid my plans before her, and pointed out the dangers to which they were exposed. She grasped the idea at once, and immediately volunteered her help to smooth matters in England. I accepted it gladly, for she has a strong influence over her son, the present Duke, and she is the sister of Mr Forfar. Oh, the Duchess is a dear old lady!"

"But surely she has failed you now?"

"By no means, madame. It is a sad fact that there are some people in England who take no interest in the conversion of the Jews—rather dislike them than otherwise, indeed. The most prominent of these anti-Semites (they are very mild, you understand) is Lord Ormsea, who holds a minor post in the administration. He has picked up some garbled idea of our intentions from the Continental press, and speaking two nights ago at a public meeting, he thought fit to denounce our scheme, and to invite the hostile attention of the Powers to it. That's all."

"And what measures do you intend to take?"

"I hear from my friend the Chevalier Goldberg that he has arranged for a fall in the price of Consols, madame, but I have told him that is a mistake. The fall could not affect British credit, but it would give colour to the accusations of Ormsea and his crew, and might stimulate the nation to active hostility. England won't stand being bullied, though she will yield a good deal to friendly representations. I have written to the Duchess, and I don't doubt that the Government will bring Ormsea to his senses in a very short time. Meanwhile, I hope the financial panic may be stopped before anything serious happens."

"I wish you would tell me how you manage that sort of thing," sighed the Princess.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that, madame," was the reply,

delivered with so much suavity that the Princess could not decide whether want of will or want of ability constituted the obstacle.

"After all, England has very little interest in the matter," she said.

"Little enough, madame, especially after declaring, in one of her periodical self-denying ordinances, that in no case would she permit an Englishman to become governor of Palestine."

"You do not always see eye to eye with your countrymen, Count?"

"I fear, madame, that I can scarcely consider myself an Englishman at this late day, although my enemies are fond of saluting me with the name."

There was meaning in Cyril's tone, although the eyes which met those of the Princess were devoid of expression, and a novel and by no means unpleasant idea struck her. She was revolving it hastily in her mind when she spoke next, somewhat absently.

"Has anything happened?—does the deadlock still exist between your Syndicate and Scythia?"

"There is no alteration, madame. Before Scythia will allow us to have Palestine, she demands a promise that your son shall be the first governor."

"It is a great pity—I mean that such a good work should be stopped. Will you accept me as an auxiliary, Count? or am I too transparent a plotter? I will write to Pavelsburg, and represent that you are powerless in the matter. Then perhaps the stipulation may be withdrawn."

"Madame, I am overjoyed by your condescension." Cyril did not consider it necessary to say that in any case the joint pressure of famine and poverty must cause the withdrawal of Scythian opposition in a day or two.

"Oh, I assure you it will be a great delight if I can give you any help. You will let me know how your difficulty

with England ends? We shall miss your charming niece terribly. I hope Princess Soudaroff will spare her to us for a day now and then while she remains at Ludwigsbad."

Cyril retired, well content. He had secured what was of the greatest moment to him, an invitation to continue his visits to the villa after Philippa had quitted it on the morrow. When he had left her, the Princess sat for some time musing deeply.

"I cannot be sure," she murmured at last. "It is true that he seems to have no feeling for Ernestine but that of dislike—certainly he does not love her at this moment—but one can never tell. They might meet, and the sight of her might revive all the old feelings. Those caressing ways of hers!—and he is just the man to take a whimsical pleasure in her perpetual inconsistency. How is he to be tested? for I dare not risk anything until I am sure of him. He and I, reigning in Palestine! *Palestine?* we would rule the world. How I should triumph over Alexis and Bettine and the Powers! But there is always Ernestine in the background. How am I to be rid of the fear of her? Ah, that photograph! That will do what I want. He comes again, say, in a week; there will be time to have it enlarged. Birnsdorf!" she raised her voice, and the Countess entered, "I want you to write a letter to Vindobona for me at once."

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKING WITH THE PAST.

A WEEK had passed since Philippa's departure from the villa before she entered it again, accompanied by her uncle, to spend the day with Princess Lida. Cyril's presence had not been sought by his niece. In fact, poor Philippa, terrified lest she should be helping to involve him in the toils of the Princess of Dardania, had assured him plainly, almost rudely, that she preferred to go by herself. But Cyril could be singularly dense when he chose. He insisted that he had nothing particular to do, and could find no more delightful employment for an idle hour than escorting his niece to the villa. This assurance only confirmed Philippa's fears, and the crowning touch was put to her misery by the message which awaited Cyril on his entrance, that the Princess would be glad to see him if he could spare her a few minutes. Philippa cast an imploring glance at him, but he smiled wickedly at the sight of her woe-begone face, and followed the servant sent to conduct him to the Princess's boudoir.

"Some dodge on hand," he muttered to himself, when the man had left him with the announcement that her Royal Highness would receive him in a short time. "I wonder what it is? Ah!"

His eye had been caught by an unfamiliar object in the room, a large portrait on an easel, carelessly draped with a

gold and crimson scarf. It was turned away from him, and he went round the easel to look at it, only to recoil with a start which even his self-control could not restrain. The gay hues of the drapery served only to accentuate the utter desolation revealed by the photograph. A woman, dressed in white, was sitting listlessly upon a block of stone, her hands clasped loosely in her lap. The portrait revealed with cruel distinctness the grey hair, the lines in the worn face, and the unfathomable sorrow in the hopeless eyes. The Princess had given special directions that the reproduction was to be a faithful, not a flattering, one.

"Good heavens!" broke from Cyril under his breath, "and this is Ernestine!"

The wild rush of remorse and pity almost made him stagger, as he stood with clenched hands and compressed lip before the portrait; but it was succeeded by a vehement indignation against the woman who had deliberately prepared this miserable shock for him. "I showed you little mercy when last we met, dearest," he muttered, addressing the pictured Ernestine; "but she shall have none."

The sound of his own voice recalled him to himself, and before the faint *frou-frou* of the Princess's silk-lined robes, sweeping over the polished floor, announced her approach, he had had time to compose his features, and to adopt an attitude of interest, not untouched with criticism, as he stood before the portrait. The Princess came rustling in, exquisitely dressed (during the past week she had mitigated the severity of her weeds in various scarcely perceptible ways, which caused the general effect to be considerably less sombre), graceful and gracious, with the utmost made of every good point in face and figure. Truth to tell, her mood at the moment was not of the most tranquil. It had been no part of her plan that Cyril should be left alone with the portrait of his old love. She had intended to confront him with it unexpectedly, and to scrutinise with jealous minute-

ness the effect it produced upon him, but the stupidity of the footman had prevented this. If she felt any anxiety as to the result of her experiment, she did not betray it, however. Her whole manner was expressive of a superb confidence in her own power to charm, as compared with the faded and unhappy woman in the photograph. As she entered, Cyril turned towards her with a start, letting his eye-glass drop from his hand.

"Pardon me, madame," he said hastily, without waiting for her to speak first, "but I cannot help tracing in this portrait some resemblance to the features of my august mistress, Queen Ernestine. Surely it is not possible that the photograph is hers?"

"Now who can have put that portrait here?" cried the Princess, in tones of strong irritation. "Yes, it is the latest likeness of my poor cousin, and I have just had it enlarged at Vindobona, but it was not intended for exhibition in public. Birnsdorf is so officious!" She lifted the scarf as though to cover the picture with it, but Cyril stopped her.

"Permit me to entreat you to leave the portrait as it is, madame. If your Royal Highness needed a foil, you could find no better one than this."

The callousness of the words would have disgusted most women, but they rejoiced the Princess's heart. Her expedient had succeeded. She let the scarf fall, and stooped to look at the photograph more closely.

"There is no posing in it, you see," she said. "My unhappy cousin never knew that she was watched. The original was merely a snap-shot taken by one of the doctors whom the King sent to Syria to visit his mother. There was some idea that it might be necessary"—*possible* was the word on the Princess's tongue, but she had no intention of revolting Cyril by an undue display of her hatred towards the woman she had injured—"to place her under restraint, and indeed it

was a fortnight before she would consent to receive the doctors. But when they saw her they found that violence formed no part of her disorder, merely extreme depression, as you perceive there."

"Madame, it is too sad for words," returned Cyril, in the perfunctory tone of one who finds it incumbent upon him to sympathise in a matter for which he has no sympathy. The Princess noticed his manner with marked satisfaction.

"Alas, Count! I have bored you. You must forgive me. My poor cousin and I have always been such devoted friends. But tell me how you have settled your dispute with England?"

"Without difficulty, madame. The day after my letter reached the Duchess of Old Sarum, Mr Forfar, speaking in London, took occasion to dissociate himself and the Government from the views expressed by Lord Ormsea, and very soon afterwards Lord Ormsea himself, in fear of losing his post, explained that his words were to be understood only in a Pickwickian sense. The slight fall in Consols was so adroitly managed that it seemed the result rather of public alarm than of a Jewish *coup de main*, and British opinion has definitely ranged itself on our side."

"Good generalship usually meets with good fortune," said the Princess, with a smile that converted the truism into an infinitely flattering compliment.

"You are too kind, madame. May I hope for your good wishes in the next little difficulty that lies before me?"

"Indeed you have them, Count. But what is this new trouble?"

"I am obliged to leave for Vindobona to-morrow, madame. One of our agents, whose name you may have heard, the scientist Texelius, has contrived to embroil himself with the Vindobona University, and the citizens, whose sympathies are strongly Anti-Semitic, are making a racial question of the matter."

"And you leave to-morrow?" said the Princess, with an irritation which she made no attempt to conceal. "It seems quite impossible for me to keep in touch with your movement as I was hoping to do."

"If I might have the honour of waiting upon you on my return, madame, it would be my delight to report such success as I may meet with. Your wonderful sympathy and kindness——"

"Oh, pray come, Count. You are not mistaken. I am deeply interested—perhaps more than is altogether wise," she sighed. "You don't know what a practical proof I have just given you of my sympathy. I have instructed my son Kazimir to withdraw from the candidature which was so embarrassing to you."

"Madame, I am overwhelmed. When you graciously offered to exert your influence on our behalf, I little dreamed of this."

"It is a sacrifice, I don't deny," said the Princess, sighing again. "With my son enthroned at Jerusalem, I should have little left to wish for. You know that in crusading times the Kings of Jerusalem were said to wear the crown of the world? But I felt it my duty, Count. Kazimir is too young, too inexperienced, for such a post. He would be merely the mouthpiece of Scythia, and I fear your poor Jews would be as badly off as they are now. Besides," her eyes met Cyril's, "there is a man who ought to be appointed, and he is not Kazimir."

"Alas, madame, that I can exert no influence even in favour of your candidate!"

"It is unnecessary, Count. My candidate will win the suffrages of the Powers by virtue of his fitness for the post. Even now he would be found, like Themistocles, second on every list. He has links uniting him to all the Powers, but he is bound to none. He can work or fight his way to power, as may be necessary, and it would surprise me very much if he failed to keep what he had won."

"Ah, madame! What hope is there that so suitable a person should ever obtain the post?"

"There is the help of friends, Count, and there is a curious condition suggested in a letter I have just received from Pavelsburg. The Emperor consents to withdraw the demand for an Orthodox Prince, but insists that Orthodox influence shall be present in some form in the new state. If the future governor were married to an Orthodox princess, for instance, all would be well. A quaint idea, is it not?"

Cyril considered the matter as gravely as if he had believed that the Emperor was really responsible for the suggestion. "I fear, madame, that it is only mentioned because it is impracticable," he said. "How could the person you speak of aspire so high?"

"Ah, Count, all is fair in—other fine arts as well as politics. Hearts move faster sometimes than the pens of diplomatists."

"True, madame, but the world has sometimes occasion to say that presumption is rightly punished."

"That, Count, will never be said of the man I mean. If he is willing to be guided by me, he will leave that part of the matter in my hands. He will continue his diplomatic campaign, and the rest is my business. Is there any reason why he should refuse to accept the arrangement, Count?"

"I see none, madame, unless he is a fool."

Cyril kissed the hand held out to him, and retired. The Princess flung the scarf contemptuously over the portrait of Queen Ernestine.

"There!" she cried, "you have done your work, and I don't want your miserable eyes staring at me any longer. Birnsdorf, call one of the servants to take this thing away."

Following on the complete success of this morning's experiment, however, the Princess's plans were threatened by a danger of an entirely unforeseen character. Her son's with-

drawal of his candidature happened very opportunely for the Scythian Court, which was anxious to climb down gracefully from its untenable position, in view of the necessity for yielding to the demands of the United Nation. Still, the opportuneness of the fact could not be allowed to stifle inquiry as to its cause. There was something suspicious, or at any rate strange, about the Princess of Dardania's proceedings, and a suitable emissary was despatched to look into them. The day after Cyril had left Ludwigsbad for Vindobona, economising the time spent in travelling by making notes for the letters which Mansfield, sitting opposite him, was working off with feverish haste on the typewriter, Prince Soudaroff arrived at the villa from the north, and requested to be allowed to wait upon her Royal Highness. The news of his advent paralysed the Princess with momentary dismay, but an instant's reflection decided her to embark upon a bold course.

"You have no bad news for me, I hope, Prince?" she asked anxiously of the visitor, when he was ushered into her presence.

"None, madame; and I grieve to have alarmed your Royal Highness. My reason for intruding is a vexatious delay which has interrupted our communications. We understand that you have ordered your son to withdraw from his Palestine candidature, but we have not yet been informed of the reasons for your action."

"No?" said the Princess sweetly, although this authoritative demand for an explanation roused her ire. "But you, Prince, can have had no difficulty in perceiving my motive?"

"I must confess with shame, madame, that your diplomacy is too deep for me," was the cautious reply. Prince Soudaroff thought he could guess the motive very well, but he did not intend to exhibit his suspicions unnecessarily.

"You will make me too proud, Prince. That you should be baffled by my little plot, and find it necessary to come to me for information! Surely you must remember begging me

to involve Count Mortimer in some intrigue that would bring about his political ruin?"

"Naturally I remember it, madame. This step, then, is a part of the process?"

"Undoubtedly, Prince. The unfortunate man is at this moment captivated by the double hope of winning my affections and finding himself appointed Governor of Palestine," said the Princess, with a hardihood that was nothing less than magnificent. Prince Soudaroff listened in amazement.

"The scheme, madame, is colossal in its boldness and simplicity. How do you propose to bring about the *dénoûment*?"

"That will be your part, I think, unless I can see my way to secure the pleasure for myself. What do you say, Prince? Will Mortimer be sufficiently discredited when it is known that he was intriguing for his own advancement while posing as the disinterested friend of Israel?"

"It would be enough for Europe, madame, and for his enemies among the Jews; but there is a large section, with his friend the banker Goldberg at its head, that would care nothing so long as he did not betray them."

"I see. Then we must think of something else. How would a secret understanding do—say that, in consideration of a handsome sum of money, he was to resign in favour of a Scythian Grand-Duke a month or so after his election?"

"It is an excellent idea, madame, for the Jews would be specially chagrined to find themselves outbidden. But permit me to ask whether your Royal Highness intends to appear as the temptress, or as a fellow-dupe, when the *dénoûment* comes?"

"As the temptress, of course," replied the Princess, without a moment's hesitation. "I can't resign my European reputation, even for the sake of sparing Count Mortimer's feelings."

Prince Soudaroff found himself foiled. He had felt certain

that the Princess would justify his suspicions at this point, but she had stood the test, and he had no option but to believe her. "May I ask whether your Royal Highness's efforts have been attended with success hitherto?" he asked.

"I cannot boast that success is absolutely secure," she replied thoughtfully. "Every man has his weak spot, as you know, Prince, but with some men it is very difficult to find. It is my impression, however, that Count Mortimer is safely landed."

"You are not afraid that he is encouraging you in that belief for his own purposes?" Prince Soudaroff suggested, with becoming diffidence.

The Princess's heart uttered an indignant contradiction, but her lips did not echo it.

"Do you know," she said, leaning towards him confidentially, "that has struck me more than once? 'What if he is merely amusing himself with me?' I have said; but I have seen nothing, absolutely nothing, to justify the misgiving. And I am a woman of some little experience, Prince."

"Indeed, madame, I have often envied you. Since all is secure, then, we may go forward. The pressure of circumstances has forced us to send orders to-day to our ambassador at Czarigrad to withdraw his opposition to the Jewish concession. When Count Mortimer is at the pinnacle of popularity among his friends on account of this success, I would propose that we make public his negotiations with you."

"Excellent, Prince! You won't publish my name, of course? My sons might object to that; but a few dots and dashes and asterisks would only add to the piquancy of the affair." In her own mind she resolved quickly, "Then I must marry him before it is generally known that the concession is granted. That in itself will destroy most of the effect of the *exposé* when it comes; and as to the rest—well, I will make him Prince of Palestine whether Scythia or any one else stands in the way."

"It is an unsatisfactory business," Prince Soudaroff said to himself as he left the villa. "Clever men have undoubtedly been beguiled by astute women before now; but it is most unlike Mortimer. I can't help suspecting that he has some plot on hand. At all costs we must anticipate him in exploding the mine."

The news which had summoned Cyril to the Pannonian capital was sufficiently grave. Vindobona had long held a bad pre-eminence among the cities of Europe on account of its malignant Anti-Semitism, and that most militant of philosophers, Dr Texelius, had managed to bring matters to a climax at this very unpropitious moment. His feud with the town was of old standing. Some years before, when his fame was only beginning to spread beyond the bounds of his own seat of learning, he had been invited to deliver a course of lectures at Vindobona. The course was largely attended, but the students of the University, who came to scoff and remained to howl, formed the greater part of the audience. To lecture, save in dumb show, was impossible, and Dr Texelius shook the dust of Vindobona from his feet, declaring darkly that the city should yet rue the day it had insulted him. The passage of time and the spread of his fame did not tempt him to forget his threat, and he devised a scheme of vengeance, which he unfolded, under a promise of secrecy, to the Chevalier Goldberg. The financier pointed out that the plan would involve the Jews in universal odium, and brought pressure upon him promptly to renounce it. Dr Texelius consented, under protest, to forego his revenge, and would probably have kept his word but for a hostile move on the part of the University of Vindobona. The latest idea in the city was to boycott everything that was Jewish, and in an evil hour the University resolved to follow the fashion. A boycott was decreed forthwith against the works of Dr Texelius, which were

extensively used by the students and professors belonging to the faculty of philosophy, and it proved disastrously effective. The injured author rose up in his wrath, and descended upon his foes with might and main in the columns of a newspaper owned by the Chevalier Goldberg. No one thought of boycotting that particular paper while the wordy war continued, for Dr Texelius had a pretty taste in opprobrious epithets, and the whole empire rang with the echoes of the strife. But the University remained unaffected by the wealth of logic showered upon it. Dr Texelius might demonstrate the iniquity, folly, illiberality, or anything else of its conduct, but it was not in his power to bring about the removal of his books from its *Index Expurgatorius*. Once convinced of this fact, the philosopher relieved his feelings in a parting letter that outdid all its predecessors in scurrility, and prepared to make use of more material weapons.

Such was the state of affairs when Cyril left Ludwigsbad, summoned to Vindobona by urgent letters from the Chevalier Goldberg, who was alarmed by his own knowledge of what Dr Texelius had proposed to do. Events developed rapidly during the few hours that followed, and when Cyril reached the city he found one of the Imperial chamberlains awaiting him on the railway platform, with a face of direful import.

"We were all in darkness last night," he said, after a hurried greeting.

"Then Texelius has nobbled the gas company?" asked Cyril.

The official nodded. "We of the Court should not be sorry to see the municipality punished," he said, "for they richly deserve it; but there will be barricades in every street, and a massacre of the Jews, if this goes on. The electric light is only in use in one or two quarters."

The situation was serious enough. The lighting of the city was in the hands of a company, floated chiefly by means of Jewish capital, upon the dividends of which the Anti-

Semitic majority of the municipality had for many years cast a covetous eye. An attempt to buy up the plant and fittings by force had been foiled by appeal to the courts of law, but the check served only to stimulate the townsmen to discover some means of coercing the company. The plan at length adopted involved the expenditure of an enormous sum of money, and a long course of litigation and chicanery, but it was successful in its object of exhausting the resources of the victims. The municipality was now in possession of a lighting system of its own, almost in working order, and the value of the company's shares was rapidly approaching the vanishing point. But the new gas supply was not yet ready for use, and here Dr Texelius found his opportunity. When the strife first began, a committee of the company's shareholders had been formed for the purpose of defending its rights, and since the majority of its members were Jews, he had now little difficulty in persuading them to unite in a last desperate effort. If it did not succeed in saving their property from spoliation, it would at least incommode their enemies seriously.

The day before that on which Cyril reached Vindobona was a holiday at the gasworks. The furnaces were allowed to grow cold, the retorts remained uncharged, the gas-holders empty, and as soon as the small amount of gas in reserve had been consumed, every jet in the city, after flickering precariously for a time, went out. Summer had passed its prime, and the evenings were drawing in, but the heat was still intense, and the citizens were enjoying themselves in their brilliantly lighted public gardens. On this particular evening the brilliance was somewhat to seek, and there were many complaints even before the moment at which all became darkness. An Anarchist plot was the first thought, and an irresistible panic seized the crowds of pleasure-seekers. Some rushed wildly hither and thither, others waited tremblingly in the stupefaction of terror. It was some

time before even the police could collect their wits sufficiently to inquire into the mystery. At length, by the joint exercise of persuasion and moral force, as typified by the erection of temporary lights at the street-corners, and the employment of cavalry to disperse the crowds, they induced the populace to seek their homes, and a commission of inquiry was despatched post-haste to the gasworks. The explanation afforded by the few melancholy officials in charge was a simple one. Owing to the persistent machinations of its enemies, the company's dues had been withheld from it, so that it was unable to procure coal for conversion into gas. Its whole reserve stock had been worked up, and prompt financial aid alone could enable it to obtain more. The honourable officials of police had better apply to the municipality. But the municipal gasworks, the police were well aware, would not be in working order, even if operations were carried on both day and night, for a fortnight at least, and it was impossible to contemplate the horror of a gas-famine lasting for that period. Hence the appearance of the Imperial chamberlain at the station to meet Cyril and convey him in a Court carriage to the Schloss, whither the Chevalier Goldberg had already been summoned; and hence also the furious mob assembled in the street outside, howling for the destruction of the Jews and the division of their property among the burgesses of Vindobona. Just as Cyril reached the carriage with his conductor, his servant Dietrich, who had been looking after the luggage, stepped up to him.

"Excellency," he said hurriedly, "there is a riot. You cannot pass through the streets in safety."

"I am not deaf," said Cyril coldly—then, turning to the chamberlain with a smile, "My man is an old servant, and privileged, but I don't feel obliged to humour him in everything."

The chamberlain was beginning to look uncomfortable, but he nodded, and followed Cyril into the carriage. Mansfield

took his place upon the opposite seat, and they drove out of the station, to be greeted with a storm of yells and execrations. "Traitor! renegade!" were the epithets that saluted Cyril as soon as his clear-cut, contemptuous profile was recognised, and the mob surged up to the carriage with fierce shouts of rage. Those who succeeded in reaching it attempted no actual violence, for the presence of the man who was so absolutely unmoved by their clamour seemed to paralyse them, but those behind, unable to catch a glimpse of the visitor, did not feel the influence of his silent scorn. Cyril had turned to make a remark to the chamberlain, when Mansfield sprang up with a cry, and threw himself before him, only just in time to intercept with his shoulder a large stone which was hurled through the window, the broken glass cutting him about the face.

"Well done, Mansfield!" cried Cyril, while the chamberlain called frantically to the coachman to turn and drive back again into the station.

"You would never turn tail before a mob?" cried Cyril, roused at last.

"How should I answer to the Emperor if you were injured, Count?" was the reply. "Besides, it is not expedient to expose the Court vehicles to insult—and—and this brave young man's wounds ought to be dressed. I will merely send to the barracks in the next street for an escort of cavalry, and we shall not be more than a few minutes."

The station was gained in safety, and a surgeon summoned, who adorned Mansfield's face most artistically with strips of sticking-plaster, much to the disgust of the victim, who persuaded himself that he could have stanching the wounds with his handkerchief in another minute, if that idiot had not poked his nose in. When the decoration was complete, a troop of lancers was ready to escort the carriage, and the progress through the streets to the Schloss was made in gallant wise, a fence of bristling points and fluttering

pennons separating the endangered visitors from the sullen, baffled mob.

At the Schloss the elaborate rules of the ordinary etiquette were suspended in view of the importance of the crisis, and Cyril was conducted at once to the Emperor's private cabinet, where he found the Chevalier Goldberg and the Minister of the Interior. There was no time to be lost if Pannonia was to be saved from such an outbreak of Anti-Semitic fury as might spread all over the continent, and result in the settlement of the Jewish question in a much more drastic manner than was contemplated by the United Nation. The Chevalier had already telegraphed orders, at his own risk, for large supplies of coal, which was to be converted into gas as fast as it arrived from the various mining districts, but this was only a temporary expedient. It did not take long to arrange a concordat, since those assembled in council were genuinely anxious to come to an agreement, and in less than an hour it had been decided that a fair purchase price should be paid to the gas company by means of a loan from the Chevalier. This was to be guaranteed by the Imperial Government, and repaid by the municipality, to which coercion was to be applied if necessary. Every effort was to be made by the company to ensure the full supply of gas to the city that night and afterwards, and any deficiency was to be supplemented by means of a free distribution of oil to the poorer citizens. In conclusion, pressure was to be brought to bear by the Chevalier on the militant Dr Texelius, and he was to be ordered to leave Vindobona within twenty-four hours. A special Imperial proclamation spread the news of the settlement through the city, the streets were patrolled by troops, who dispersed the mob, and before long the only crowds to be found were in the vicinity of the railways, where they were watching the heavily laden coal-trucks as they rolled past on their way to discharge their load at the gasworks.

The Chevalier and Cyril were *personæ gratissimæ* at Court that day, and the latter took advantage of the fact to accomplish another piece of business connected with the Palestine scheme which was destined to astonish the Princess of Dardania when she heard of it. Meanwhile, the Chevalier presented himself as an ambassador of authority and peace at a hastily convened meeting of the representatives of the gas company. The members of the committee were already alarmed by the success of their bold step, and he plunged them into a state of abject terror by hinting at an intention on the part of the government to confiscate the works and carry them on for the public benefit. When they had been reduced to a sufficiently pitiable condition, he raised them suddenly to the seventh heaven by disclosing the arrangement which had been made, and sent them home happy in the prospect of saving something from the wreck. Their defection cut the ground from under the feet of Dr Texelius, who was the next person visited by the financier, and whose only regret hitherto had been that he dared not venture into the streets to observe the working of his revenge. His short-lived satisfaction was ended by the peremptory order to quit Vindobona, and he almost wished that he had not indulged in his trip to the city when he found himself listening to the upbraidings of the Chevalier, who charged him roundly with doing his utmost to ruin the cause of Israel.

The crestfallen philosopher was making his way on foot to the station the next morning, shadowed at a distance by two police officers in plain clothes, when a carriage containing two men drove past him. Although Dr Texelius had prudently kept his name concealed, for fear of the attentions of the populace, the mere fact that he was a Jew had made it impossible for him to procure a cab to convey him to the railway, and his luggage was being carried by a hanger-on of the police. But if the inhabitants of Vindobona were unconscious of the identity of their illustrious guest, the

second secretary of the Scythian Embassy, who was one of the occupants of the carriage, was more fortunate.

"Look there!" he said to his companion, to whom he had been recounting with great spirit the humours of the preceding day, "that is the redoubtable Texelius himself. I used to see him continually when I was in South Germany."

"Would it be possible to express one's sympathy with the eminent philosopher?"

"Scarcely, Prince—in public, at least. Look at those two fellows behind. They would have a fine story to tell if they saw you speak to him."

"You are right; they must not see it. Yet it would be a thousand pities if I could not speak to him. Volodia, my dear boy, do you think we could drive back to the station for a moment? I have unfortunately forgotten to inquire about my train."

"Of course—as many moments as you like." Prince Soudaroff's godson knew something of his methods of working. "Am I to do anything?"

"Only watch me, and when I succeed in approaching Texelius, distract the attention of the detectives for a second or so."

"Very well, Prince." The secretary was not without practice in work of the kind, so that when Dr Texelius had finished haggling with his porter over his charge, he found himself confronted by a dapper gentleman, exquisitely dressed, whose grey moustache was waxed into points of needle-like sharpness.

"I have the honour of addressing the Herr Professor Texelius?" said the stranger hurriedly in German, laying one finger on his lips.

"I am that most shamefully ill-used man," snorted Dr Texelius.

"You would like to expose the Mortimer?"

The philosopher's eyes sparkled. "Only give me the chance!"

The other drew out a sealed envelope, and slipped it into his hand. "That will provide you with the means of doing so. Hide it at once. I am Soudaroff."

With a dexterity which a professional conjurer might have envied, Dr Texelius made the packet vanish up his sleeve. "It shall be done," he said.

"When does your paper appear?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Let it come out then without fail. Any delay will spoil the effect."

"It shall be inserted."

The colloquy, which had scarcely lasted a moment, was over, and the speakers moved apart, Prince Soudaroff to return to his godson, and Dr Texelius to take his place in the train, chuckling with delight over the thought that he had now the means of ruining Cyril and annoying the Chevalier Goldberg at one blow. His revenge would draw down upon him instant punishment from the Chevalier, he knew, but he could afford to disregard that in the joy of the moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A KIND OF WILD JUSTICE."

THE business which had called Cyril to Vindobona once ended, he returned to Ludwigsbad with Mansfield, to find awaiting him at the hotel a note from Princess Soudaroff, couched in very urgent terms, and entreating him to come and see her that evening, as she was leaving the baths the next day with Usk and Philippa.

"Do you care to come with me, Mansfield?" he asked, tossing the note across to his secretary.

The smile of gratification which overspread Mansfield's features at the question disappeared with startling suddenness, for the cuts on his face were still painful, and he murmured dolefully that he was not fit to go anywhere.

"Didn't know you were so keen about your personal appearance," said Cyril. "Nonsense! come at once."

His objections disposed of in this summary fashion, Mansfield submitted with the best grace in the world when Cyril took him by the arm and fairly led him out of the house. Arrived at the gate of Princess Soudaroff's lodgings, the prisoner found himself suddenly released.

"You may as well wait out here for a minute or two," said Cyril. "I must explain the origin of your facial adornments, and I'm afraid you would blush yourself to death if you were listening. How many years is it, I wonder,

since I was able to blush? I'll call you in when I have finished."

In this considerate intention Cyril was foiled by Usk and Philippa, who had been watching for his approach from the verandah, and came to meet him. Mansfield showed signs of a desire to escape, but Cyril seized him again and explained briefly that the fellow had saved his life, and had repented of the deed ever since. Having thus placed matters on a right footing, he went into the house to find the Princess, leaving the three young people together, Usk, with awestruck face, plying Mansfield with every conceivable variety of question. As for Philippa, the tears which threatened to overflow forbade her speaking, but she proffered timidly such little services as occurred to her, seating the hero in an easy-chair, and bringing him, in spite of his protests, a cushion and a footstool. When her further suggestions had been gratefully but firmly declined, she sat down and gazed at him with an expression that made the young man's heart beat wildly.

"Oh, I say, Lady Phil," he protested incoherently; "you mustn't make so much of it. It wasn't anything, really."

"He would have been killed but for you," persisted Philippa; "and you are dreadfully hurt."

"Nothing but a bruise, truly; and these scratches on my face—not half as bad as those German fellows get in their college duels. I'm ashamed to be tied up so aggressively; but the doctor would do it."

"Of course," said Philippa wisely. "And you ought to be proud of your pieces of plaster. I am."

"No accounting for tastes," said Usk; for Mansfield was unable to do more than beam gratefully upon Philippa. "Did you get any chance of paying back the chap that threw the stone, old man?"

While Mansfield was fighting the battle o'er again in answer to the questions showered upon him, Cyril had found

his way to Princess Soudaroff's sitting-room. The old lady looked up with a smile as he entered. "We were expecting you," she said.

"After the blood-curdling note you sent me, you couldn't well do less, Princess. Please relieve my mind as soon as possible. What is wrong?"

"It was a conversation I had with Philippa that made me send for you. Have you noticed how unhappy she has been looking lately?"

Cyril shook his head solemnly. "Princess, Princess, if you have got a clergyman concealed in the next room, and want me to let my secretary marry Phil on the spot, I must tell you frankly I won't do it. It wouldn't be fair to Caerleon and Nadia."

"As though I should dream of such a thing!" Princess Soudaroff was more nearly angry than Cyril had ever seen her. "A clandestine marriage for my darling Phil, and under my auspices! Lord Cyril, you should be ashamed of yourself for suggesting it. No, Philippa's anxiety, and mine too, is all on your account."

"Ought I to be more flattered by your interest, or grieved for your anxiety, Princess?"

"You are incorrigible, Lord Cyril. I assure you I am absolutely in earnest. Phil is making herself miserable with the notion that you are in love with the Princess of Dardania, although I have done my best to show her its absurdity. No man who had loved Queen Ernestine, however imperfectly, could transfer his affections to the woman who wrecked her happiness."

"Your sentiments are mine, Princess."

"Then what are you doing? Your passion for the Princess has become a by-word in her household. Even Princess Lida amused herself with it in talking to Phil. You cannot profess to be ignorant of this, Lord Cyril. You are not the man to drift into such a position blindfold, and I can

only judge that you have some object in pursuing this course."

"See what it is to have at hand a critic acquainted with all the follies of one's youth! I must congratulate you upon your clear-sightedness, Princess."

"But you and she have been enemies too long to work together with any confidence. It must be in the hope of improving your political position that you are trying to induce her to marry you."

"No, Princess; there you are wrong." Cyril spoke with a firmness that carried conviction. "Nothing on earth could make me marry the Princess of Dardania, or any woman in the world but Ernestine. I don't know why I should tell you this, except that I suspect you to be in communication with Ernestine, and I don't want to add to her troubles."

"Then you still love Ernestine?"

"I still love Ernestine—have always loved her—though I own that for a few days I thought I should be glad never to see her again. She thwarted me, and at the time I could think of nothing but punishing her. I won't cant and say that I suffered as much as she did; but when I turned my back on her, I punished myself. The want of her has tormented me ever since."

"And now you are making love to her cousin!"

"I see you don't understand me yet, Princess. I cherish a hope—a dream, you may call it—of finding my way some day to Ernestine, and entreating her forgiveness—her compassion. But something else must come first."

"And what is that?"

"The woman who separated us has to be dealt with."

"You are deliberately deceiving the unhappy creature?"

"You will make me conceited, Princess. Is it for me to plume myself upon having produced an impression upon the heart of her Royal Highness?"

The Princess waived the evasion away impatiently. "You are seeking to revenge yourself upon a woman."

"When a woman has twice pitted her wits successfully against mine, Princess, she is entitled to be treated as a man."

"But who are you, to revenge yourself upon her?"

"Simply a man she has injured. I treat her as she treated Ernestine."

"As you treated Ernestine, you mean. Your hands are no cleaner than hers. It was your wounded ambition that enabled her to separate you from the Queen."

"I don't deny it, Princess. I behaved like a brute, I know—possibly like a fool, which is worse. But she has ruined young Michael, inflicted enormous injury upon Thracia, and hunted Ernestine rancorously from place to place."

"You gave her the opportunity of doing it all. And think; you speak of returning to Ernestine. Would she wish you to avenge her wrongs in this way?"

"Certainly not; but then I don't do it to gratify her. I tell you, Princess, a few days ago I had almost decided to be satisfied with the political portion of my revenge, and to forego the rest of it. Then the woman took it into her head to boast in my presence of her cruelty to Ernestine—to flaunt her own insolent charms in contrast with Ernestine's misery—intending, I suppose, to complete her conquest of me; and I swore that she should have no mercy, since she showed none. That is why I am going on to the bitter end."

"But how can you expect a blessing on what you are doing?"

Cyril's momentary fury cooled into mild impatience. "My dear Princess, I am not in search of a blessing. What I want is revenge."

"Think what sorrow you have brought upon Queen Ernestine already. Can you—dare you—expose her, when your lives are linked together, to the retribution which must follow upon this plot of yours?"

"I can bear my own punishment, Princess. It would be a singularly unjust dispensation of Providence that visited my sins on Ernestine. I fancy that had not occurred to you, had it?"

"Her love for you will make your punishment hers. She would not escape it if she could. Do you forget that the Princess of Dardania is an unscrupulous and vindictive woman? She is not likely to allow herself to be slighted with impunity, and she may make your life with Ernestine a misery to both of you."

"If I succeed this time, Princess, the luck will have turned, and I am not afraid of its turning again."

"Lord Cyril, will nothing turn you from your purpose? I have known you now for many years, and each time that I see you leaves a sadder impression on my mind than the last. It seems to me that God must deal with you very signally before you will learn to give up your own way. I am an old woman, on the very border of the grave, and I do entreat you, by any kindness you may have for me, by your love for Ernestine, by the great work in which you are engaged, to relinquish this plan of revenge."

The old lady bent forward with clasped hands, panting in her eagerness, her eyes fixed anxiously on Cyril's face. He met her look with good-humoured frankness.

"Really, Princess, I am sorry not to be able to please you. One doesn't often get a chance of redressing the inequalities of the world a little, and I can't give it up when it comes."

"Then I feel it my duty to say that I intend to warn the Princess of Dardania against you. I shall postpone my journey for a day, and ask for an interview with her. I shall make no use of what you have told me, of course; to hear of my own suspicions should serve to put her on her guard."

"As you please, Princess. Her Royal Highness may pos-

sibly prefer my word to yours, after all. How can the poor old lady be so quixotic as to show me her hand?" he asked himself as he went out. "It only means that I must be at the villa first."

A cipher telegram from Czarigrad was awaiting him when he returned to his hotel. "Scythian opposition withdrawn; concession will probably be granted in a day or two," it ran, and Cyril smiled.

"I think that for many reasons to-morrow will be a good day for undeceiving her Royal Highness, and possibly for electrifying the world," he said to himself, all unconscious that Dr Texelius had already prepared the way for both processes, by means of the indictment so considerably drawn up by Prince Soudaroff.

When Cyril repaired to the villa early the next day, he was ushered into the great drawing-room, which he found deserted, almost for the first time in his experience. The servant who had admitted him went to seek Countess Birnsdorf, but had no sooner closed the door behind him than Cyril heard the Countess's voice in the inner room.

"The Princess Soudaroff is very anxious to wait upon you, madame."

"What, that old heretic?" Like other converts, the Princess was inclined to be more orthodox than the Orthodox themselves. "I don't want to listen to her sermons. She hopes to convert me, I suppose? No, Birnsdorf, I won't see her."

"I think, madame, that her only wish is to express her thanks for your kindness to her god-daughter, Lady Philippa."

"That is quite unnecessary. I sent a message to her by the girl, requesting her not to give herself the trouble. I can't stand these psalm-singing Evangelicals, although I tolerated little Philippa for the sake of—her family." Cyril smiled, gathering from this remark that the household at the

villa had found Philippa's society as little congenial as she had found theirs.

"The lady is very old, madame," ventured the Countess, "and she seems extremely desirous to see you. She entertained me——"

"I tell you, Birnsdorf, I won't see her. What impertinence! Tell her that I am engaged—that I am always engaged at this hour. As though I should put off Count Mortimer for the sake of receiving her! Didn't you say you saw him coming? Bring him in, if he has arrived."

Cyril had moved noiselessly to the farther side of the drawing-room before Countess Birnsdorf lifted the curtain that hung over the doorway. He caught the look of annoyance on her face as she realised that the door between the two rooms was open, but he met her with an expression so absolutely unmoved as enabled her to comfort herself with the assurance that he could not have heard anything.

"Her Royal Highness will receive you, Count," she said, and the Princess looked up with a very natural start as he passed under the curtained doorway. She was reading a newspaper, which Cyril recognised immediately as the 'Jewish Colonist,' a journal conducted by Dr Texelius in German and Jargon, to promote the agricultural and commercial development of Palestine, and its re-population by the Hebrew race. It was not quite the kind of paper one would expect to find in the hands of a great lady of rigidly Orthodox views, but there could be no doubt that the Princess was deeply interested in it.

"Well, Count, are you come to scathe me with bitter reproaches?" she cried, looking up from the closely printed page.

"Alas, madame! your conscience must have outrun my just indignation. I was not even aware I had been injured until now."

"What a misfortune it is to be in too great a hurry!"

cried the Princess. "I thought, of course, that you had heard of my treachery from our friend here, and were come to denounce me. There is no hope of hiding it from you now."

She handed him the paper, which displayed in a conspicuous position the announcement that it would appear no more under its present editorship. An editorial note explained that Dr Texelius, aware that his independent course was distasteful to the proprietor of the journal, felt it his duty to throw up his post and wreck the paper. His position thus indicated, the editor proceeded to business. He had always, he said, doubted the disinterestedness of Count Mortimer, but he had forborne to ventilate his suspicions until accident had shown them to be entirely justified. The man who posed as the high-minded friend of Israel was merely a vulgar schemer, seeking to exploit the greatest movement of the age for his own benefit. His ambition had led him to lend a ready ear to the blandishments of Scythia, the natural enemy of Zion, and he had fallen victim to the wiles of a Delilah hired to entrap him. While deceiving his unfortunate supporters, he had been deceived himself. The post of Governor of Palestine had been promised him, together with the hand of his enchantress, as the price of his care of Scythian interests throughout the negotiations, and in consideration of a large sum of money he was to resign his position in favour of a Scythian nominee immediately after his election. There had never been the slightest intention of keeping faith with him, however. The lady, whose identity was not obscurely hinted at, had held him in play as long as he was useful, only to cast him aside when she had done with him. He had betrayed Jewish interests in vain, and now that it suited Scythia to throw him over, he stood revealed in all his baseness as a faithless agent and an unsuccessful traitor. Through this indictment, couched in terms which did not err on the side of refinement, Cyril glanced carelessly, and, having read it, handed it back to the Princess.

"Well, what have you to say?" she asked him.

"I am utterly at a loss, madame. I have nothing to say."

"What, Count! you don't even feel called upon to testify the slightest sorrow for the way in which my name is involved in your proceedings?—for it is impossible for any one not to see who is meant."

"Ah, madame, my assailant has displayed a scrupulous regard for your feelings. You are the conqueror throughout, not the victim."

"Then you accept the *rôle* of victim, Count?"

"Even so, madame. What can I do but acknowledge your triumph and ask your gracious leave to retire? A discredited traitor is no fit associate for your Royal Highness."

"Stop, Count! You have carried on this farce long enough. Why pretend to take the man's nonsense seriously? You know as well as I do that whoever may have been deceived, you were not."

"What, madame? Are you trying to restore my lost self-esteem? to re-establish your empire over me, according to Dr Texelius?" Cyril was smiling.

"Pray, Count, be serious. What is the object of raising a new barrier between us at this moment, when this kind enemy of yours has unintentionally broken them all down? The hero and heroine occupy the stage, every eye is fixed upon them, and the stupid audience, which thinks it has followed the play with the deepest attention, anticipates what it imagines to be the *dénoûment*. But it is mistaken, for it has failed to see what was before its eyes. The true *dénoûment* is the simplest, the most unconventional possible—all honour to the actors who have grafted it on so hackneyed a plot."

"I fear I am very dense, madame. Am I to understand that you and I have been acting some comedy for the edification of the spectators? or should it be a tragedy?"

"Why play upon words, Count? A tragedy is what the

audience expected, undoubtedly, for the fall of a great man is far more tragic than his death, but the slightest possible alteration in the original *motif* makes a happy ending not only natural, but inevitable."

"My stupidity is colossal, madame. Might I venture to entreat you to point out to me the alteration to which you refer?"

"Are you trying to tease me, Count? The audience saw only a pair of politicians, each striving to outwit the other. But on the stage were a man and woman playing into each other's hands."

"With reference to what, madame?"

"You are indeed dense, my dear Count." There was some irritation in the Princess's tone. "You force me to speak with disagreeable plainness. They were playing for a crown and a ring. But why this extraordinary display of ignorance in a matter you have discussed with me for weeks?"

"It seems to me, madame, that one of the actors on the stage was under the same delusion as the audience. Would it suit your Royal Highness to drop metaphor for a moment, and let us see how we stand?"

The Princess was genuinely puzzled. She lifted her eyes to Cyril's face, but discovered there no response to her smile. Was it possible that the man had misunderstood her from the beginning? No, it was merely that he was cautious, he would not commit himself without specific encouragement. "You cannot have forgotten our compact already?" she cried merrily.

"I was not aware that there was any compact between us, madame."

The Princess began to perceive whither all this tended. "Not that I was to make you Prince of Palestine? and you——" she stopped suddenly.

"Far from it, madame. My hopes have never climbed so high."

Horror was taking hold upon her, but she was still unconquered. "Let them make the effort, then, Count. Otherwise Europe will see you as the traitor this journalist calls you. You are too deeply involved to draw back with honour. I hold your reputation in my hands, and Prince Soudaroff is behind me. Choose! Safety and——" she touched the wedding-ring on her finger, "or——"

"Evidently, madame, you are unaware that I have just recommended the Emperor of Pannonia to nominate Prince Franz Immanuel of Schwarzwald-Molzau as his candidate for the post—one of the posts—you are good enough to offer me. His religious opinions are so truly liberal—for in view of the uncertainty as to his future he has been brought up on an admirably eclectic system, so as to be ready for any country that may need a king—that he seems the very man for it."

The vague terror which had seized the Princess became certainty. Her face hardened, her lips grew tense, and her right hand went swiftly to her head. Cyril understood the movement. The peasant-girls of Dardania carry in their hair a silver-hilted dagger as a part of their elaborate head-dress, and the Princess had worn the national costume constantly before her widowhood. He wondered mechanically whether she had contrived to retain the weapon under the folds of her cap, and if so, how many seconds he had to live. Almost before the thought had crossed his mind, however, the hand dropped again, empty. The dagger was not there. The Princess pointed silently to the door, and he bowed and retreated. Her voice arrested him before he reached the threshold.

"Why have you done this?" she demanded passionately. "Oh, I know—I have not forgotten your threat to revenge yourself on me. But that I should have been deceived by you—I!"

She sat for a moment without speaking, then rose and came towards him.

"Come, Count, you have had your revenge, and enjoyed it, no doubt. You had a right to it, I will confess, so let it pass. We are quits now. Why not start afresh? Purely as a matter of business, don't you think you are very foolish to quarrel with me? You and I together could do anything we chose. What is the use of pitting our wits continually against each other? You know what I can do for you—you have no prospects otherwise. Let us blot out the last quarter of an hour. Why should not our compact remain in force? What do you say?" She laid her hand upon his arm, and behind her honeyed smile a passionate eagerness shone in her eyes and trembled upon her lips. Many men would have succumbed to the temptation of the woman and what she offered. Not so Cyril.

"I can only repeat, madame, that I know of no compact."

She drew back from him and stood erect. "Then there is some other woman," she said, absolute certainty in her voice. "Is it Ernestine?"

"It is Ernestine."

"I wish you joy, then. Go!"

She pointed again to the door, and he went out, conscious that she would have sold her soul for a weapon ready to her hand, and that if wishes could kill, neither Ernestine nor he would live much longer. In the excitement of the moment the Princess had ordered him out by the private door at the back of the boudoir, instead of that opening into the large drawing-room. As he entered the anteroom a female figure quitted it hastily by the opposite door, and the Scythian Captain Roburoff tried to look as if he had been alone for some hours.

"Ah, Roburoff, you here?" said Cyril, nodding to him.

"Simply on an errand for his Majesty, Count. I was the bearer of a letter to her Royal Highness."

"And you were tempering duty with pleasure when I came in?"

The Scythian's face darkened. "Do you — would you insult—pray consider, Count——"

"My dear fellow, we were all young once, even ladies-in-waiting. I wish you an uninterrupted interview next time."

"All the same," murmured Cyril, as he quitted the villa by the private door, leaving Captain Roburoff reassured, "I am much mistaken if the young lady was not Princess Lida, and not a *dame d'honneur* at all. I fear there are further troubles in store for my poor friend the Princess; but after thrusting King Michael back upon the unhappy girl once already, I really can't bring myself to spoil her plans a second time. I wonder how long they have been carrying on this affair?"

CHAPTER IX.

VERSIONS DIFFER.

"BIRNSDORF!" said the Princess.

There was no answer. Truth to tell, poor Countess Birnsdorf was dozing in an uncomfortable high-backed chair in the great drawing-room, where she had remained during Cyril's interview with her mistress, after delivering a softened version of the latter's message to Princess Soudaroff. Her knitting and her spectacles were left behind in the anteroom beyond the boudoir, where Captain Roburoff was improving the shining hour in a way that would have made her hair stand on end had she known of it, and the low murmur of voices from the intervening room had lulled her to sleep. The imperious tone in which the Princess repeated her summons reached her ears, however, and she made her appearance, full of apologies, at the inner door. The Princess was sitting at the table, her head supported pensively upon her hand.

"If Count Mortimer should present himself here again, Birnsdorf, remember that I will not receive him," she said.

"No, madame?" hazarded the Countess, consumed with curiosity. It was evident that the crisis which every member of the household had been anticipating, although the Princess had apparently been blind to its approach, had come; but how, and with what result?

"He would scarcely venture to show himself," pursued the Princess, meditatively, "but one can never tell. And exciting scenes of the kind are too much for me. Positively, I cannot stand them. I am too tender-hearted."

"Indeed, madame, it has made you look frightfully ill." Countess Birnsdorf was horrified by the strained paleness of her mistress's face. "You will permit me to summon a physician? No?" Then, her indignation increasing as the Princess shook her head with the smile of a martyr, "I could never have believed that Count Mortimer would forget himself so far as to persist in a conversation disagreeable to your Highness, even if he had the bad taste to enter upon it."

"Ah, when these self-restrained men have once lost control of themselves, there is no holding them. Did you see the poor man go out, Birnsdorf?"

"No, madame. I am certain he did not pass through the drawing-room."

"Oh no, of course. I allowed him to escape by the private stair. One does not wish to subject to public humiliation a man who is already unhappy, even though it is by his own fault."

"Ah, madame, in presence of your angelic kindness, I do not wonder that the unhappy nobleman forgot himself."

"Nonsense, Birnsdorf! You are a sad flatterer," with pathetic sweetness. "Where is Lida?"

"I believe her Highness is walking in the gardens with Mlle. Delacroix, madame," replied the Countess, with a perceptible sniff. The elderly Frenchwoman who had been Princess Lida's governess, and was now her chosen confidant, played the part of Mordecai to Countess Birnsdorf's Haman.

"Beg her to come to me when she returns to the house. I have something important to say to her." The lady-in-waiting departed, and the Princess, finding herself alone, threw aside the mask for a moment. Her right hand clenched itself in.

voluntarily, the left was pressed upon her heart as she rose and paced the room.

"Yes," she said to herself, "I will be prudent. I cannot afford to fail again. Lida must be safely married, or I shall lose my only chance of returning to power. I must have some standing-ground from which to move my world—a recognised position in some country or other. But as soon as I am sure of my footing—then, Count, look to yourself! You shall not return to Ernestine. You may scorn me if you like, but she shall not have you. I will track you step by step when you try to slink back to her, and, when you think you have won her, I will come between you. I can tell her a few little truths that will place you in a new light, my dear Count!"

She laughed mirthlessly, and returned with a swift step to her seat at the table as she heard her daughter crossing the anteroom. There was a pretty mixture of triumph and girlish timidity in Princess Lida's manner as she came into the room, and her shining eyes and rose-flushed cheeks were eloquent of shy happiness. At any other time her mother's eagle glance would have perceived the change immediately, but now the Princess was too much engrossed with her own thoughts to observe it.

"Ah, Lida!" she said. "I wanted to tell you that I think it advisable to hasten on your wedding a little. It will be a year next month since your father died, and there is no reason why you should not be married the month after."

"Oh, mamma!" faltered Princess Lida, in dire dismay. "Michael is such a boy," she explained, recovering herself.

"He will be nineteen then. Many kings have been younger when they married."

"But he is so—so disagreeable. You know, when I have complained to you of his behaviour, you have always said he would undergo a change and become quite different before we

were married ; but he hasn't done anything of the kind yet. Lately he has been worse than ever."

"Well, you will have the pleasure of superintending his reformation yourself. You are not the girl I think you if you can't make him treat you with proper respect."

"Oh, I am not afraid of that." Princess Lida raised her dark head proudly. "But, mamma, I don't see any reason for being in such a hurry. I don't care to be married just yet."

"My dear child, you talk as if you had only to hold up your finger and Michael would come whenever you chose to claim him. But that is not the case. He would be little Philippa's bridegroom now if she would have taken him."

"I only wish she had !"

"Lida, this is childish. Michael can give you a crown, and you don't find crowns hanging on every bush. The eligible princes of Europe are not contending for the light of your *beaux yeux*, my dear—far from it. You must take what you can get, or you will end by getting nothing."

"It's very hard," pouted Princess Lida, "that the only person I can get should be so horrid. Bettine had no trouble of this kind. Look how devoted Albrecht is to her."

"I know he is, my dear child ; but that can't be helped. Bettine's marriage was arranged for her just as yours was, and we could not tell how differently Michael and Albrecht would turn out. Of course circumstances were more favourable at the time of her wedding. Your father's death, and your brother's unkind behaviour in depriving us of a home, place us in a difficult position at present, and Michael does not show the consideration he might. But for your comfort, Lida, I will say this. Michael is one of the most pliable men I know, if you take him the right way. Once get rid of his present companions, and make yourself necessary to him, and

he will be your devoted slave as long as you take care not to pull the chain too tight."

"I should like to snap it at once. I don't want to marry him. Mamma, you married for love, didn't you?"

"My dear Lida!" The Princess was shocked. "Who has been talking to you of such things? You have picked up a wrong idea, of course. What really happened was only that when my father chose to turn against the lover whom he had himself recommended to me, I did not."

"I knew that was it! And you married him?"

"I did; but then, you see, we had been allowed to fall in love with one another. I have taken care that there should be no complication of the sort in your case."

"But Bettine and Albrecht love one another."

"My dear child, pray don't cavil. I mean, of course, that I have taken care you should have no chance of falling in love with any one but the man you are to marry."

"But he doesn't love me."

"You are becoming a little tiresome, Lida. There were unfortunate circumstances which obliged me to hasten on your betrothal before Michael had perceived the nature of his feeling for you, and unhappily he resents being bound, as he considers it. But I have already said that you will be able to set things right as soon as you are married, if you go the right way to work."

"But, mamma, you say you were right in disobeying your father because it was for your lover's sake. If I had a lover, mamma——?" She came forward a little with clasped hands, and her eyes rested entreatingly on her mother's face. The Princess laughed coldly.

"Don't imagine impossibilities, my dear child. You have no lover—could not have one without my knowledge, and I have no intention of allowing you such a luxury. You will marry Michael two months hence, and I shall write to him to-day to make arrangements. The letter will take some

time, for I must be careful how I put things. That equerry of his had better wait until to-morrow before returning. Czartoriski and he must amuse one another."

"We were thinking of a ride this afternoon," suggested Princess Lida meekly. Her mother nodded assent.

"That will do very well. By the bye, Lida, if you should come across Count Mortimer, you need not speak to him. Bow, of course, but nothing more."

"Yes, mamma. Has he done anything?" Princess Lida's eyes were dancing.

"Count Mortimer has thought fit to lose sight of the difference between his position and mine, and address me in a very strange way. That is all."

It was enough for Princess Lida, who never dreamt of regarding Cyril as anything but an unhappy victim of her mother's charms. She told the story with great glee to Mlle. Delacroix, and Mlle. Delacroix retailed it to a compatriot who was visiting the baths. Since every one at Ludwigsbad takes a childlike and unabashed interest in every one else's affairs, it was known by the evening from one end of the little town to the other that Count Mortimer had conceived a romantic adoration for the Princess of Dardania—and had declared it to its object! Coming so soon after the revelations put forth by Dr Texelius, the story met with instant and universal acceptance, and there were only a few people who remarked that Count Mortimer must have been playing for very high stakes when he allowed himself to appear such a fool. Mansfield had been spending the afternoon at one of the shooting-galleries, where the gilded youth of both sexes were wont to consume much valuable time in massacring little wooden soldiers by means of air-guns. Here he heard the tale, and returned to the hotel with a settled gloom on his countenance such as even the fact of Philippa's departure had been insufficient to produce.

"Why so sad, gentle youth?" asked Cyril, catching sight of his face.

"They are saying all over the place that the Princess of Dardania has—has given you the sack, Count," said Mansfield tragically.

"They are—are they? Really there's something positively demoniacal about that woman's cleverness! And you, Mansfield, you—try to comfort me in my misery with the assurance that my sad plight is known all over the town!"

"It's not true?" burst from Mansfield.

"Since the Princess has spread the report, she must intend it to be believed. Is it for me to contradict a lady? Rather let me study how best to corroborate her assertion. I must go to dinner in a Norfolk jacket, I suppose, and neglect my appearance generally. If Dietrich could only be induced to forget to shave me! But perhaps it would be just as effective if I let my moustache droop for a day or two. What do you say, Mansfield? You will look disconsolate too, of course—in fact, you are doing it already—but you will wear your rue with a difference. The Confidant is only allowed to go mad in white linen, you know. Tilburina's white satin must be reserved for me."

"But the Princess has given orders that you are to be refused admission if you try to see her."

"Oh, that's what is afflicting you, is it? Make your mind easy; I have no intention whatever of trying to see the Princess."

"But will you let her go on spreading these lies about you?"

"Why not, if it pleases her? They are telling worse lies about me all over Europe, and it does me no harm. You and the Chevalier Goldberg seem to take these things to heart much more than I do. By the bye, mind you show up when the Chevalier arrives to-morrow. He wants to speak to you."

The Chevalier's reason for wishing to see Mansfield was made clear on his arrival the next day, when the unwilling secretary found himself invested with a gold watch and chain of surpassing magnificence. The watch was decorated with an inscription to the effect that it was a slight token of admiration and gratitude for Mansfield's bravery in saving Count Mortimer's life, and the chain carried a small fortune in the way of charms, which puzzled the recipient not a little. The Chevalier had originally intended his testimonial of gratitude to take the form of a diamond ring of the size and lustre commonly seen only on South African mine-owners and the monarchs of high finance, but on consulting Cyril he found that such an ornament in Mansfield's possession would never see the light of day, and with reluctance chose instead the best watch that money could buy. He had taken a great fancy to Mansfield, purely on Cyril's account, and he dismissed him now with an assurance of future favour which would have driven one of his own nation wild with joy. Mansfield, who was English, and failed to appreciate properly the power which the Chevalier possessed in right of his millions, received the promise without any particular emotion, and went out for a mountain walk. Left alone together, the Chevalier and Cyril turned their attention to business. They spoke in English, for the Chevalier was proud of his proficiency in that language, and liked to keep himself in practice.

"Well, have you come to tell me that I am the best-execrated man in Europe?" asked Cyril.

"If dere was such noose to tell you, I would not be de men to do it," was the quick response. "No, my frient, de storm is passed ofer your head like water off a duck's beck."

Cyril smiled involuntarily. "This is extremely gratifying, Chevalier. You think Texelius has overreached himself, then?"

"Undoubtedly. You know he was placed on de board off

manachement off de United Nation? Well, de directors met yesterday, and expelled him, solely on account of his atteck on you."

"But that was purely your doing, of course."

"Not at all. Dere were some det took your side from de first, and de rest came ofer to it ess soon ess dey heard off your confersation wid de Emperor about Prince Franz Immanuel. Dey saw at once det you hed been foolink de Seythians all de time dey thought dey were foolink you, and det it was not you, but de mysterious lady, who hed been deceifed in de metter."

"But how did the Franz Immanuel business come out?"

"I saw to det, my frient. Dere was an inspired paragraph in all de Findobona papers yesterday which related de facts."

"I am sorry you did that, Chevalier. If the proposal has become public, it means that there is no hope of getting it adopted."

"Dere nefer wass any," said the Chevalier calmly. "I hed sent an achent to sound de Prince's parents, and dey would not hear off his goink to Pelestine. Dey mean him to merry de young Queen of Frisia."

"Another check!" cried Cyril. "I thought we were on firm ground at last. Then my journey to Vindobona was all for nothing?"

"By no means, Count. De proposal may hef failed, but at least it safed you first. It was so netural and so suitable det no one could believe de story off Texelius. Herschel Rubenssohn, whom I met passink through Vindobona, hess written a great article on de subchect in my paper, which I hef wid me, and you shell see it. Transferrink his republican fiew to you, he says det de nobility off your cheracter and aims would prent you from efer dessirink to make yourself a prince."

"It is dangerous to dogmatise," said Cyril gravely. "If Palestine was offered me by a unanimous vote of the Powers,

I fear all Mr Rubenssohn's pledges on my behalf would not make me refuse it."

The Chevalier smiled, but wistfully. "Ah, my frient, why were you not born a prince—efen a Cherman prince-link?" he said.

"Probably because Europe would have been too small to hold me. Now, pray, Chevalier, no hankering after impossibilities."

"You might efen now become a confert to Rome, and buy a dukedom from de Fatican," suggested the financier, with the uneasy smile of a man experimenting on the edge of a slumbering volcano. "De money iss et your serfice, and wid de Chews supportink you on one side and de Chesuits on de oder, not efen Scythia could hope to keep you out of Pelestine."

"Ah, if I could take you over to Rome with me, there might be something in the idea," responded Cyril instantly. "The Goldberg millions would be welcome indeed at the Papal Court. But without them—— No, Chevalier, it won't do. And what has happened to Texelius?"

"He retains de direction off de colonisink scheme, but he hess lost his influence in our cheneral councils," replied the Chevalier, accepting the change of subject obediently and gratefully. "Det will allow Koepfle to come to de front—a better men off business, dough widout de European lustre off Texelius, and one det hess nefer yet receifed de full recognition he desserfes. It was from an idea off his det I gained de first notion off foundink our Syndicate, in order to help to completion de schemes he hed outlined. We shell do better now den before, I think."

"When do you expect to get your concession?" asked Cyril suddenly.

"Fery soon," replied the Chevalier. "It may be two—three days, det iss all."

"And when you have got it, you will have no need of me for

a month or so? I want a holiday. A trip to Syria would do me good, I think."

"To Syria? to Pelestine, you mean. Ah, my frient, you hef a plen! You will not hide it from me? De Goldberg millions are all et your serfice. You intend to make yourself master off de Land by a *coup de main*?"

"My dear Chevalier, I don't intend anything of the kind. I am quite in earnest in saying that the governorship is out of my reach. My visit would be purely private and unofficial. You may call it a pilgrimage if you like, although the saint whose shrine I have in view is alive and not dead."

"You would not deceife your frient?—dough I shell not be engry if I hear you hef esteblished yourself dere. I know your prudence, Count. But you will not be lonk away? Our affairs in Europe will go to ruin widout you."

"I don't expect to be long, but it depends on the success I may meet with. If others get before me, I shall have a poor chance. But business first, Chevalier. If you need me in Europe, I won't go."

"My frient, if dis fissit iss for your adfantache or pleassure, you shell go whatefer heppens. Dere iss always the telegraph by which I may consult you."

In the fulness of his generosity, the Chevalier proceeded to develop a plan by which a staff of operators with a field telegraph were to follow Cyril from place to place, so as to keep him always in touch with the European headquarters of the Jewish movement. His schemes were interrupted by the arrival of a telegram in cipher, which he read to Cyril with triumph in his tones: "Czarigrad. You are wanted here. Concession will probably issue to-morrow or next day."

"It iss well," said the Chevalier. "To-night I leafe for Czarigrad. I return wid de concession, den you start for Pelestine. One confersation we must hef first, to settle our line off ection in future."

"All right," said Cyril, and the financier departed. On his

return from his walk, the astonished Mansfield was desired to hold himself in readiness for a journey to Syria, which might become necessary at any time within the next month. No explanation was given, but he attributed the probable necessity to the business of the Syndicate, and having made his preparations, awaited placidly the summons to start.

CHAPTER X

TAKING COUNSEL WITH BABES.

ON the third morning after the departure of the Chevalier, Mansfield was sitting writing in the anteroom at the hotel, when the garden door opened violently, and an elderly lady hurried up to the house. Mansfield thought she was a *Kurgast* who had lost her way, for she was wrapped in a loose cloak, and had a lace scarf thrown over her head, in the style affected early in the day by ladies who were taking the waters. On going to the door, he was astonished to find himself face to face with Countess Birnsdorf, in a state of violent excitement.

"Where is Count Mortimer?" she cried, trying to push past him. "I insist on seeing him immediately."

"I will find out whether his Excellency is able to see you, Countess," said Mansfield, holding his ground. "He may be engaged."

"Oh, then he is here? Then I am not too late!" and the old lady sank down upon a bench and broke into gasping sobs. "Oh, Mr Secretary, let me see him. I must see him, I tell you!"

Surprised and perplexed, Mansfield knocked at Cyril's door. "Countess Birnsdorf is here, Count, and says she must see you. She is in a terrible state about something," he added, stepping inside the room.

"What can be the matter now?" said Cyril. "Some trick of the Princess's, I suppose. Well, you had better ask her in."

Before Mansfield could obey, the Countess, her suspicions roused by his closing the door behind him, forced her way in. For an instant she stared wildly round the room and incredulously at Cyril, then flung herself at his feet.

"Oh, Count, give her back to us! Where is she? What have you done with her—my little Princess? She never did you any harm. You may cherish a grudge against her mother, but have you the heart to revenge yourself on the child?"

"Calm yourself, Countess," said Cyril, so gently that the old lady choked back her sobs and allowed him to raise her and lead her to a seat. "What has happened to the Princess? I don't understand you."

"She is gone," sobbed Countess Birnsdorf, "and so is the Frenchwoman, her attendant. No one saw them leave the house, and there is not so much as a note to say where they are gone. As soon as the poor Princess—her mother—heard the awful news, she said, 'This is Count Mortimer's doing. He is taking his revenge on me,' and I threw on a cloak and ran all the way here in the hope of softening your heart before it was too late."

"Alas, Countess, I cannot tell you where the Princess is," said Cyril. "But let us consider what we can do to obtain news of her Highness. You did not intend to speak before my secretary, did you? Mr Mansfield, please see that this visit is not mentioned."

Mansfield retired, and finding in the garden the old manservant who had accompanied Countess Birnsdorf, told him to wait in Paschics's room, lest his livery should be recognised by the hotel servants. Scarcely had he returned to his writing when footsteps upon the path announced a second visitor. This time the intruder was Colonel Czartoriski, a white-mous-

tached veteran of many fights, and master of the household to the Princess of Dardania.

"Where is your master, young man?" he inquired, looking Mansfield over in a peculiarly irritating way.

"Count Mortimer is in his office," returned Mansfield curtly, resenting the style of address.

"Oh, indeed! Then I wish to see him."

"Unfortunately you can't. His Excellency is engaged."

"So early?" very mildly. "I am indeed unfortunate. Who is with him, may I ask?"

"A lady."

Colonel Czartoriski's face became livid. "And you venture to acknowledge that to me?" he roared. "Who is the lady?"

"I am not at liberty to mention her name."

"Out of the way, young man! Let me pass."

"Gently," said Mansfield, shifting the old soldier adroitly from the inner door. "I don't know what you mean by coming here and behaving as if you were in a comic opera, but it won't take much more to make me kick you down the steps."

Colonel Czartoriski's hand went promptly to the place where his sword-hilt was wont to be, but remembering that he was in plain clothes, he repressed his wrath, and made a gallant effort to be calm.

"I ask your pardon, young sir. If you knew the reason for my excitement, you would excuse it, but you have not, I am sure, fathomed the full villainy of your master's character. No," as Mansfield made a threatening movement, "I will not speak against him. I ask you only to risk his displeasure for a moment for the sake of the honour of an august family, and the future of an unfortunate and misguided young lady."

"What do you want me to do?" asked Mansfield, unconvinced.

"You see my position?" Colonel Czartoriski turned to

the wall, and stood with his face almost touching a map of Western Asia which he appeared to be studying. "I give you my word of honour that I will maintain this attitude while you approach the lady, and entreat her to return immediately with her attendant to the home she has forsaken. I will not move until she is outside the garden, when I will venture to attend her back to the villa. I shall not have seen her here, you are a young man of honour and will not speak, the world will only know of an early walk. Come, you will help me to save her?"

"I am sure you are making some mistake about the lady," said Mansfield, in much perplexity; but he approached the door of Cyril's study, reaching it just as the owner opened it to escort Countess Birnsdorf to the gate. The old lady's cry of surprise on catching sight of him made Colonel Czartoriski forget his promise and turn round, and both looked unutterably guilty.

"I suppose," said Cyril, "that I ought to feel flattered at your both regarding me as such a Lothario; but I assure you the honour is quite undeserved."

"It was the words the Princess used," explained Countess Birnsdorf, apologetically. "A mother's instinct——"

"I am afraid her Royal Highness's instincts are not to be trusted where I am concerned. This is not the first rumour she has set afloat about me, you will remember."

"Do you intend to impute malice to her Highness, Count?" demanded Colonel Czartoriski hotly.

"By no means, Colonel. I merely state a fact."

"Of course," said Countess Birnsdorf, unaware of the admission she was making. "How can you try to pick a quarrel with the Count, Colonel, when he may have given us a clue to our poor Princess's flight? If you will make inquiries about Captain Roburoff's destination when he left this place three days ago, while I go home to try and calm her Highness's mind, it may help us a little."

"Oh, if Captain Roburoff has acted as Count Mortimer's deputy——"

"The Count once saw him talking to Princess Lida, that's all. But if you go on wasting time like this, how are we to save her? Come, come," and Countess Birnsdorf hurried the old soldier out of the house, and saw him start in the direction of the station. But her haste was in vain. A telegram which arrived that evening from Princess Lida informed her mother that she was married to Captain Roburoff, and that the ceremony had been performed by an Orthodox priest in the chapel attached to the Thracian Legation at Vindobona. This astonishing fact made it clear that some personage high in authority had been acting in collusion with the fugitives, and before long every one at Ludwigsbad knew that the Princess of Dardania had solemnly declared she would never forgive Count Mortimer for his part in the affair. Cyril smiled when the news reached him.

"Excellent!" he said. "She has now a legitimate reason for hating me, whereas before she could not very well avow the cause of her enmity."

The person who had told him of the rumour, and to whom he spoke, was the Chevalier Goldberg, just returned in triumph from Czarigrad with the long-coveted concession in his hands. The possession of Palestine was once more secured to the Hebrew race.

"But wid whom is she seekink to inchure you?" asked the financier in reply. "Europe knows now de truth about her defeat in de affair celebrated by Texelius, and will not believe her. Dere must be some one outside de ranche off politics det she wishes to influence."

"It is just possible," said Cyril drily. The Chevalier took heart of grace.

"My goot frient," he said, "you will not take it amiss if I alloode to your prifate affairs? You hef nefer honoured me

wid your confidence about dem, and I do not ask it off you ; but chust et dis moment it iss so closely connected wid de future off our great enterprice, det unless you command me epsolutely to be silent, I must speak."

"My dear Chevalier, there was nothing to confide. My private affairs are common property all over Europe, it seems to me. If you have any contribution to make to the discussion, pray let me hear it."

"I hef a request to make off you first. You must know det since it became efident det de concession would be granted, we hef hed ill noose from Pelestine. Rubenssohn, who iss chust gone out dere to inspect de colonies, says de officials are prepared to ressent our comink. A pasha here, a sheikh dere—dey all fear we shell confiscate deir offices and cut short deir dishonest gains. De Greek and Letin Churches encourache dem in dis epprehension, hopink to raise a rebellion against us, so det Europe may step in and refuse us de Land. Now, you are about to fissit Pelestine. Will you go about amonk dese officials ess de emissary off de Syndicate, and quiet deir minds? Dey could nefer stend out against you."

"You are very kind. If I can do any good by reassuring the timid, I shall be glad to be useful."

"You will make what arrangements and promises you please ; dey shell be kerried out. Some off de officials might be continued in deir posts et a fixed selary, oders be pensioned off. Den dere are de Beni Ismail—dose Arabs in de desert between Damascus and Baghdad. Dey hef been told by some enemy det we intend to gerrison Palmyra and exect a heafy tribute from dem, and deir chieftainess, whom dey call de Queen off de Desert, threatens to appeal to Europe. You will come to terms wid de lady, and reassure her ess to our intentions? Dere nefer wass a woman you could not talk ofer."

"I will certainly do my best to conciliate her dusky

Majesty. An appeal to the Powers would land us in endless complications."

"True; but dere iss more at stake still. While de diplomatists are squabblink in Europe ofer de gofornorship off Pelestine, you are on de spot, treffellink ess a prifate indifidual, yet makink peace and pleasantness wherefer you go. It iss well for you to be out off Europe et dis moment, my frient, but it is better for you to be in Pelestine. You are already a *persona grata* et Czarigrad, et Vindobona, et de Magnagrecian Court. Hercynia will follow Pannonia. You are de right men for Pelestine, and dey must see it."

Cyril shook his head. "It sounds excellent, Chevalier, but, after all, I am not big enough for them. They might accept me as an emergency man, just to do the dirty work and put the place in order; but it would be strictly stipulated that as soon as things were pretty quiet some prince-ling should step into my shoes."

"No!" cried the Chevalier, with almost a shout. "Not if your prifate intention in goink to Pelestine iss what I think. De saint you desire to fenerate—pardon my boldness—iss it not de Queen Ernestine?"

"It is," said Cyril, not quite calmly.

"Den all iss well. You merry de Queen; dere iss de position you need. Through her you are connected wid half de royal families off Europe. Dey must profide for her, find some post not disgraceful for you. Here it iss."

Cyril rose involuntarily from his seat, and began to walk up and down the room, while his companion, trembling with excitement, watched him narrowly. "You have taken me by surprise, Chevalier," he said at last, returning to his place. "It was my last thought, in seeking to recall myself to the memory of the lady you mention, to better my own fortunes."

"Yes, yes; I understand det. But what do you say now?"

"The matter is too complicated for me," said Cyril idly. "I must refer it to some one who can only see one side to a question. I will take counsel with babes, and be guided by the advice they give me. Mansfield," he stepped into the anteroom, "I want your opinion on a point of morals."

Mansfield glanced up quickly, suspecting a hidden irony in the request; but Cyril's eyes met his gravely enough.

"Suppose you had behaved badly to the woman you loved—broken her heart in fact. Oh, for pity's sake——" as Mansfield attempted a protest, "isolate your thoughts from my niece for the moment, and imagine it possible that you could treat a woman cruelly. What would you do when you repented and wished to undo the past?"

"Go to her and ask her to forgive me—if I could muster up sufficient cheek."

"Quite so. And if she refused to look at you?"

"I think," with diffidence, "I should ask her again."

"And worry her until she consented, I suppose? Well, that is not the question I wanted you to consider. Suppose a reconciliation with the lady meant the greatest possible improvement in your worldly prospects, would you still feel free to seek her forgiveness?"

"I see." It was evident that Mansfield was somewhat staggered by this view of the case. He sat silent, turning it over in his mind, for some minutes. "It would be perfectly beastly if people—or she herself—thought one had done it for the money," he muttered at last. "Is it supposed that the lady still cares for you—I mean me—Count?" he asked suddenly.

"How can I tell? Well, yes; suppose she does."

"Oh, that makes it all right, of course; if it would be a comfort to her. A man couldn't fight shy of making what amends he could, just because of what people might say, could he? If she seemed inclined to forgive him, I sup-

pose he would have to tell her about the money, and see what she said. If she was willing to take him on again——”

“He must be doubly grateful, and behave better in future,” interrupted Cyril, finishing the sentence for him. “Thanks, Mansfield. See what a good thing it is to know exactly what other people ought to do! Well, Chevalier, the oracle has spoken, and the die is cast. I go to Palestine.”

The Chevalier’s beaming countenance testified his delight, and he proceeded to draw up, and submit for Cyril’s approval, a paragraph to be sent to the newspapers, stating that Count Mortimer was about to visit Palestine in the interests of the Jewish race, with a view to the discovery of spots where new colonies might advantageously be located. When the paragraph appeared the next day, the Princess of Dardania was among those into whose hands it came. She smiled contemptuously at the reason given for the journey, and called to Countess Birnsdorf for writing materials. That evening Colonel Czartoriski passed through Vindobona on his way to Syria, in charge of an autograph letter from his mistress, which he was ordered to deliver to no one but Queen Ernestine herself. The old soldier was frankly exultant on the subject of his errand. The villain who had lured away Princess Lida would at any rate not be allowed to find happiness with another woman.

In the meantime, the person whose life was most deeply affected by Princess Lida’s elopement bore himself with the utmost equanimity. It was Prince Mirkovics who outstripped the courier despatched from Ludwigsbad, and carried the news to King Michael in his mountain shooting-box. When he had delivered himself of his self-imposed message, the old nobleman paused suddenly, his weather-beaten face shining with fresh hope. The King, who had listened to the announcement with sullen acquiescence, glanced up and perceived his expression.

"What is it, Prince? You look as if a bright idea had struck you."

"That is the case, sir. Does it not occur to your Majesty that this event removes the chief obstacle to your marriage with Lady Philippa Mortimer?"

The King laughed harshly. "The chief obstacle?" he said. "You should have heard what Count Mortimer said when I spoke to him on the subject. I might have been a pickpocket. He told me I was not fit to look at her."

"Sir," said Prince Mirkovics, "I am no courtier. I cannot, as your Majesty knows, twist my rough tongue to speak smoothly, and I will not attempt to say that Count Mortimer was wrong. Even when I was doing my utmost to marry you to Carlino's daughter a few weeks back, I was ashamed of my own schemes. You were not fit then to address words of love to her, sir; you are not fit now. But the remedy lies in your own hands. Do you wish to be worthy of the lady?"

"You mean that I might promise to give up all this sort of thing?" King Michael gave a comprehensive wave of the hand, which included at once the pictures that adorned the walls of his room, the empty bottles on the table, and the scattered cards strewn the floor. "If she would marry me, I should be perfectly willing to make such a promise—and I would keep it, too," he added, with some anxiety, for Prince Mirkovics still looked forbidding.

"No, sir, that would not be sufficient. I know Lady Philippa and her parents well enough to feel sure that they would not be satisfied with promises. Your Majesty must give up all these habits at once, and submit to a period of probation, to show that you have really forsaken them, before you attempt to obtain the lady's hand."

"What a disgusting idea!" The King looked blank. He had paved the way carefully for his own suggestion, but it was quite another matter to adopt the uncompromising scheme of reform set before him. "It would be so

wretchedly hard to have to do it all without even being sure of her," he added.

"Is the lady worth it, sir?" demanded Prince Mirkovics. "And would it not give you a claim on her respect, her admiration, if you could go to her and say, 'Without seeking to bind you, I gave up all my unworthy pleasures for your sake, merely in the hope of rendering myself less unfit to address you. In order to have more to offer you, I have tried to govern my people better, and to raise my kingdom again to the position it occupied under your uncle's administration'?"

"But suppose she won't marry me after all?"

"I would not suppose such a thing, sir. The lady could scarcely fail to see that it was her duty to marry your Majesty, in order to secure the happiness of your people and the welfare of the kingdom, and I am certain that she will do whatever she feels to be her duty."

"All right, then!" King Michael dashed his fist upon the table. "By the bye, you know, you must take office if all this has to be done. I can't carry it through alone. Roburoff's conduct furnishes us with an excellent pretext for coolness towards Scythia, and then the Ministry will have to go. You shall be Premier, and cultivate Pannonia instead. That will only be until we are married, of course. Lady Philippa will certainly want her uncle to return to Thracia with her. Oh, I say, that reminds me; what about that secretary fellow? Roburoff declares he is in love with Philippa, and Count Mortimer makes a great pet of him. What is there to prevent his running off with her while I am carrying out my reformation?"

"I saw Count Mortimer only this morning, sir, before I left Ludwigsbad, and he mentioned that he was about to make a pilgrimage to Palestine, taking his suite with him. The secretary will be farther from the lady than your Majesty."

"So he will. Well, Prince, I will try your plan for three months—not a day longer. That ought to be proof enough for any girl of a man's sincerity. Don't you think you have reason to be grateful to Roburoff? I should be if I hadn't paid him in full. Oblige me by looking at this." He held out a folded paper, which Prince Mirkovics received doubtfully, and read with astonishment. It was a promise on the part of the King to pay Captain Roburoff a sum of money which to the frugal mind of the Thracian appeared colossal.

"What is this, sir?" he asked, bewildered.

"Princesses are expensive wives for commoners," returned King Michael calmly, "and Roburoff had no intention of marrying Lida on a captain's pay. I was obliged to make it worth his while."

"Impossible, sir! You arranged the elopement with your equerry?"

"Oh no, not at all. I discovered that he was in love with her through his dropping a note of hers when we were fencing one day. After we had teased him about it a little, it occurred to me that since he had gone so far for his own pleasure, he might as well make himself useful. It was very hard to convince him, for he was quite contented to let things go on as they were, and I had to point out that the prospect for the future was not exactly to my taste. At last we came to terms, and I despatched him on a special mission, giving him credentials that would carry him anywhere (of course never dreaming of the use he would make of them), and this is the way he repays my confidence! Don't you think we are well rid of him?"

Too much disgusted to speak, Prince Mirkovics bowed in answer. The King laughed. "Come, Prince, I must drink one last toast before I become a total abstainer, and you will join me in it with all your heart." He touched the bell. "Bring a bottle of champagne," he said to the servant who

answered his summons. "Fill the glasses, Prince. To Queen Philippa!"

"To her Majesty Queen Philippa!" repeated Prince Mirkovics gravely, touching the glass which the King held out with his own.

King Michael was as good as his word. Twelve hours before Prince Soudaroff, despatched in hot haste to bear him the condolences of the Scythian Imperial family, and to discover how the loss of his bride seemed to affect him, could reach the hunting-box, its tenant was hastening homewards across Europe. The state of affairs in Thracia demanded his presence there, so he gave out. Arrived at his own capital, the King found that he had accidentally spoken the truth respecting the political situation, and that the course of events was all in his favour. The shock of the sudden rupture of the betrothal on which he had built all his hopes proved too much for Drakovics, the great Premier whom Cyril had driven from office, and who had in turn ousted him. The unholy compact with the Princess of Dardania which restored him to power had become void, and almost simultaneously with the arrival of the news, a stroke of paralysis dragged from his failing hands the reins which he had clutched with such persistent determination. The rest of the Ministry, deprived of their head, and painfully aware that they held their places merely at the pleasure of Scythia, were in no condition to combat the vigorous measures of their youthful monarch. Drakovics would have bowed to the storm and maintained his position, but his colleagues, left to themselves, resisted, and gave the King the excuse he wanted for dismissing them. Returning humbly, after an interview with the Scythian agent, to tender their submission, they found their places filled up. Prince Mirkovics had accepted office, and the scattered forces of Cyril's supporters rallied round him with magical unanimity. They were of

the King's opinion. Prince Mirkovics was merely holding the premiership in trust for his leader, and very shortly the period of progress at home and high prestige abroad, which had ended with King Michael's attainment of his majority, might be expected to return.

It was in vain that the Emperor of Scythia sought to conciliate the young King by removing Captain Roburoff's name from the roll of his regiment, in vain that he despatched his brother, the Grand-Duke Eugen, on a special mission of friendship, in vain even that the Princess of Dardania sent her "beloved, deeply injured Michael" a heartrending message entreating him to return to Ludwigsbad, if only for a day, that she might know he had forgiven her. Prince Mirkovics pointed out to his master with a grim smile that the beautiful Grand-Duchess Sonya Eugenovna was now staying at the villa, and a polite refusal was returned. The opportunity of regaining her credit with Scythia by entangling King Michael a second time was not to be granted to the Princess.

CHAPTER XI.

EASTWARD HO!

FOILED in the hope of regaining her empire over King Michael, the Princess of Dardania turned with desperate vigour to the object which lay even nearer to her heart. It was not enough to count the days until she might hope to hear from Colonel Czartoriski of the success of his mission in acquainting Queen Ernestine with the villainy of the man who professed to love her—the Princess counted the very hours. At last the anxiously expected missive lay before her, but in the fulness of her triumph she allowed herself to gloat over her vengeance for a while before opening the envelope. When at length she drew out the letter and read it, the change that passed over her face was terrible to see, Colonel Czartoriski had not been successful. The Queen had positively refused to receive him when he presented himself at the Deaconesses' Institution at Brutli. He tried bribery and cajolery in vain; and Princess Anna Mirkovics, the Queen's maid of honour, who had acted as her Majesty's mouthpiece throughout the negotiations, assured him that it was hopeless to attempt to obtain an interview. She offered to take charge of the letter of which he was the bearer; but in view of his mistress's stringent order that he was to place it himself in the Queen's hands, Colonel Czartoriski thought it well to ask for further instructions.

The Princess of Dardania glanced through his formal phrases with a heart-sickening sense of bitter failure.

"He has been before me!" she said to herself, alluding not to Colonel Czartoriski, but to Cyril. "He has warned Ernestine that I shall try to prejudice her against him, and she is prepared to believe everything he says and nothing that I say. This explains his astonishing tardiness in first visiting Egypt and then Palestine, instead of going straight to Beyrout and the Lebanon. He has made things safe for himself already. Well, Czartoriski must wait at Damascus and watch for a chance of giving Ernestine my letter, and it may be possible to spoil their reunion in another way."

That very day Colonel Czartoriski received a fiery telegram in cipher, which he read without astonishment as the hasty utterance of an outraged mother, dashed off in a moment of desperation. He would have been amazed to learn that the Princess had spent hours of anxious thought over the brief message.

"Do not return to tell me that the base wretch has achieved all he desired. Is there not one among the Christians whom he has betrayed to avenge the Holy Places on this renegade?"

Colonel Czartoriski's chief impression on reading the telegram was that it was of too compromising a nature to be retained safely in his possession, and, after fixing the contents in his mind, he destroyed the paper. This done, he was able to consider the message calmly. The suggestion which it contained struck him as worthy of notice; for he had relinquished his earlier intention of challenging Cyril to a duel *à outrance*, reflecting that in such a conflict he was unlikely to be victorious. Although, in the frenzied state to which the contemplation of his mistress's wrongs had reduced him, he would not have shrunk from death if he could have ensured the destruction of his foe, he felt that justice would be but poorly satisfied if Cyril killed him and escaped unscathed.

Since, then, a duel was not to be thought of save as a last resort, he allowed his mind to dwell with something like complacency on the hint thrown out by the Princess. Palestine was filled with fanatical pilgrims from Southern and Eastern Europe; how probable it was that Count Mortimer might meet with a fatal accident while in the neighbourhood of one of their stations! For a minute or two it seemed to Colonel Czartoriski that such an accident was so likely as to be almost inevitable, but as soon as his brain had regained its balance he perceived that the matter was not one to be left to chance. Unless the consequences of Cyril's present diplomacy were pointedly brought to the notice of the pilgrims, he might pass unharmed from one end of Palestine to the other. It was clearly necessary that the destined avengers should be made properly acquainted with the state of affairs—and how should this be done unless Colonel Czartoriski made it his business? At first the old soldier shrank back appalled from the idea: it was too much like hounding men on to commit murder. But the thought of the Princess's sorrows overcame his compunction once more, and he salved his conscience with a few curt platitudes to the effect that, since the law often failed to punish the greatest offenders, it was well to ensure that justice should be done at last. Thus satisfied that it lay with him to bring criminal and punishment together, he began to ask himself how the duty might best be performed.

It is not seldom a delicate task to put in motion the slowly revolving wheels of justice, and Colonel Czartoriski realised this as he sat smoking on the verandah of his Damascus hotel and laboured at the details of his plot. It was evident that he must not appear in connection with it, since the mention of his name would lead the world to infer the complicity of the Princess of Dardania; but he found it difficult to devise any means of inciting a crowd of unlettered fanatics to the requisite degree of hatred without communicating with them directly. After various fruitless

attempts to solve the problem, he threw away his cigar and strolled out into the town, hoping that some chance sight or sound might give him the enlightenment he sought. He had scarcely left the shelter of the courtyard when the help he needed presented itself. Bumping and jolting over the alternate hillocks and hollows of the street came a carriage, in which sat a tall man with flowing black hair and beard. His dark robes, and the lofty head-dress which surmounted his stern features and piercing eyes, marked him as a bishop of the Orthodox Church. Two monks sat opposite him, so obviously in awe of his displeasure that even the discomforts of the drive evoked not the slightest murmur from either of them.

"The very man!" murmured Colonel Czartoriski. "How could I have forgotten that Bishop Philaret had gone on pilgrimage?"

The reverend travellers had only snatched a very brief rest at the Greek Convent, to which they were bound, when Colonel Czartoriski entreated the honour of an interview with the Bishop of Tatarjé. His request was granted at once, for the two men were old acquaintances. Bishop Philaret had brought the whole strength of the reactionary party in the Thracian Church to swell the forces of the Princess of Dardania when she had arranged the betrothal between her daughter and King Michael, which overthrew Cyril and restored M. Drakovics to office. In return for this signal service, it was commonly understood that when Archbishop Socrates, the Metropolitan of Thracia, should be gathered to his fathers, his successor in the see of Bellaviste would be the ambitious and able Bishop of Tatarjé. The recent events in Thracia had, of course, blurred this fair prospect, and the Bishop and Colonel Czartoriski met as fellow-sufferers by a common disaster.

"If either her Royal Highness or I myself had been in Thracia, this would not have happened," said the Bishop,

as his attendant monks brought coffee and sweet jelly for the refreshment of the visitor.

"It is a European misfortune," observed Colonel Czartoriski gloomily.

"European? it is a misfortune to the whole Church—a thing to make one shudder!" cried the Bishop. "For many years I have looked forward to this pilgrimage, but I never ventured to leave Thracia until now. Everything seems safe—the King at Ludwigsbad under her Highness's own eye—and I set out with a quiet mind. I spend two peaceful months in visiting our brethren in Armenia and Mesopotamia, and as soon as I am once more within reach of telegraphs and newspapers, what do I learn? Why, that the old dotard Mirkovics is Premier, and the Mortimer close upon his heels!"

In common with the other members of the reforming party in Thracia, Prince Mirkovics held that his own brother, Bishop Andreas of Karajevo, would be the most suitable successor to the present Metropolitan. Bishop Philaret did not mention this fact, but Colonel Czartoriski was acquainted with it.

"And it is perfectly certain that all might have been avoided if your Greatness had not been absent from Thracia!" he said regretfully. "Do you intend to return to your diocese immediately?"

"What is the use?" asked the Bishop snappishly. "The mischief is done, and I can't undo it any more than your mistress can. I shall stay here until the great band of pilgrims from Scythia lands at Haifa, as I intended, and go up to Bethlehem with them for Christmas. After all, I may be more useful when I return to Thracia than if I had rushed to measure my strength against the new Ministry at once, and had failed."

"Quite so," returned Colonel Czartoriski, with anxious cordiality. "I am certain your Greatness will find it the

best plan to remain quiescent until you see a chance to strike effectually. And, moreover, there are other reasons why I should congratulate you on having undertaken your pilgrimage this year. After a very few months Palestine will be closed to Christians."

"Closed to Christians!" cried the Bishop incredulously.

"Has your Greatness not heard that the whole country has been sold to the Jews?"

"I heard that Count Mortimer—like a discarded servant who takes to brigandage—was trying to bring about something of the sort, but in passing through Vindobona on my way to the East I fell in with Prince Soudaroff, who assured me that everything was ready for the destruction of the scheme, and the political annihilation of the Mortimer."

"Alas! events have not stood still while your Greatness was beyond the reach of telegraphs and newspapers. Count Mortimer is so far from being annihilated that he feels it quite safe to leave Thracian affairs in the hands of Prince Mirkovics, while he himself looks after his larger interests here. He has bribed the Grand Seignior to sell the country to him on behalf of the Jews, and next Easter he intends to be crowned in Jerusalem the first king of the Jewish State!"

The manifest improbability of this forecast did not strike Bishop Philaret. "And the Holy Places?" he ejaculated.

"I believe their inviolability is to be guaranteed by the Powers. But a paper guarantee!—your Greatness knows what that is, something that the Jews will tear up as soon as the Powers need money."

"We will preach a holy war against Mortimer and his Jews!" cried the Bishop. "The Orthodox of Scythia and the Balkans will rise in their millions, and free the Holy Places for ever from the dogs."

"But the conflict would be terrible, even if we were successful. Let your Greatness reflect a moment. The Jews can hire soldiers—Protestants, Moslems, Pagans even

—and there will be plenty of Hebrews who have been forced to serve in the Scythian armies to lead them. And if Sigismund of Hercynia should be seized with an impulse to take their part——”

“I see, I see,” interrupted the Bishop hastily. “But is there no hope of sowing dissension among the Jews? If those of one country alone could be brought to detach themselves from this infamous alliance, its power would be broken. I would support—even propose—concessions, substantial concessions, for the Jews in Thracia, if they would consent to abandon Count Mortimer’s scheme.”

“It would be useless. By means of some extraordinary system of terrorism, the originators of the plan have contrived to force all the Jews in the world to enter into combination with them. I questioned Speyerl, the Princess’s Vindobona banker, on the subject as I came out here, but he would tell me nothing. I could see that his mouth watered at the thought of the profit he might make if he broke loose from his countrymen, but he assured me he durst not do it.”

“The thought of the next world has little terror for a Jew,” said the Bishop, with a laugh. “Count Mortimer has probably made use of very mundane threats.”

“As mundane as his own hopes,” agreed Colonel Czar-toriski. “Has your Greatness guessed who is to share with him the throne he intends to establish in Jerusalem? No other than your late beloved and venerated regent, her Majesty Queen Ernestine!”

Bishop Philaret sprang to his feet, and an exclamation broke from him which in a layman would have been called an oath, but from his ecclesiastical lips was doubtless a solemn curse. If there was one person whom he hated more than Cyril, it was Queen Ernestine, who had refused him the Metropolitan mitre thirteen years before, preferring to dismiss M. Drakovics and risk a revolution rather than consent to his appointment. For some minutes he strode up

and down the room, alternately muttering anathemas and gnawing his beard, then halted abruptly before Colonel Czartoriski.

"See here," he said rapidly, "I will force my way into this convent at Brutli, and demand an interview with the Queen. She knows me of old—that I do not hesitate to strike—and I will make her understand that if she desires to see her lover again alive, he must give up both the Jews and his schemes of self-aggrandisement."

"It is useless," said Colonel Czartoriski again. "Her Majesty will not receive your Greatness. She refuses even to see me, although I am the bearer of a letter from my august mistress. There can be no doubt that Mortimer has warned her to receive only visitors accredited by himself. You would see no one but Mlle. Mirkovics, who will tell her mistress just as much or as little as she chooses."

"Yes, the Mirkovics girl would face the devil and all his angels in the Queen's behalf," said the Bishop, not perceiving with what unpleasant company he was associating Colonel Czartoriski and himself; "but," he spoke lightly, "if this is the case, my conscience is clear. I was merely desirous of warning her Majesty to keep her lover out of harm's way. Curiously enough, it is a fact that the pilgrims with whom I hope to travel southwards from Haifa are extremely enthusiastic—even fanatical—in their attachment to our holy and orthodox faith."

"True," said Colonel Czartoriski, "and Count Mortimer is travelling northwards from the Egyptian frontier. It would be sad indeed if he met with any accident."

"Nothing could be more lamentable," agreed the Bishop. "In fact, I feel it my duty to take precautions lest anything of the kind should occur. The simple pilgrims may quite possibly have imbibed wrong ideas of his doings, and I will therefore make a point of explaining his true character to them. I need scarcely say that I shall warn them expressly

and in set terms against using any violence if they should happen to find themselves in his neighbourhood."

"The advice is only what might be expected from your Greatness," said Colonel Czartoriski gravely. "It would be too cruel if all the care Count Mortimer has taken to divert suspicion from his intentions—approaching his goal by such a lengthy route and such gradual stages—were to be wasted."

"And how sad it would be if Queen Ernestine were to see a dead body carried into her convent, instead of welcoming a living lover!" cried the Bishop, his teeth displayed in a smile that could only be called wolfish.

The two plotters at Damascus and the Princess of Dardania would have been equally surprised to learn that they had credited Cyril with a greater degree of caution than he possessed. No letter had passed from him to Queen Ernestine, and it was not with the idea of concealing his true destination that he approached Palestine from the south. Two motives, the existence of which was scarcely confessed even to himself, he allowed to sway him. One was the determination to do his duty to the utmost before gratifying his personal wishes, which sprang rather from pride in his own self-mastery than from any ascetic notion of self-denial, but the other was a dread lest his humiliation should after all be in vain. Ernestine might spurn him as he had once spurned her. Cyril did not care to contemplate this possibility, but the mere thought made him willing to defer the time when it might become a fact. Attended by his three inseparable followers, he pursued his journey without hurry, and also without undue delay, halting here and there to meet the heads of a Jewish community, and explain the significance of the new state of affairs. Encouragement was little needed at this juncture, except in the case of those Jews who had hitherto regarded the Zionist movement with suspicion

or dislike. All the rest appeared to have taken a step forward—the step from bondage to freedom, from despair to hope—and many were already preparing their possessions for the journey to Palestine, awaiting only the summons to start.

At Vindobona Mansfield made the acquaintance of Dr Koepfle, to whom the Chevalier Goldberg was fond of alluding as the brain of Zionism. It struck him as quaintly curious that the man who had been chiefly instrumental in arousing an enthusiasm unprecedented in modern times should himself be enthusiastic purely as a matter of business. Business-like from head to foot was Dr Koepfle, intent on giving practical form to the dreams of many generations, and crystallising the vague maxims of scattered visionaries into a workable constitution. He was not ashamed to confess that it was the intolerant Anti-Semitism of his Christian fellow-subjects that had first suggested to him the possibility of a refuge over-seas for his race. Nay, his mind was so severely practical that he had been willing to look to the New World for a colonising ground when the difficulties in the way of obtaining land in Palestine seemed insuperable. In the same business-like spirit he accepted Cyril's co-operation, displaying neither the *empressement* of the Chevalier nor the distrustfulness of Dr Texelius. Cyril, on his side, declared to Mansfield that it was the most refreshing thing on earth to come across a man who was content to accept facts as they were. Capable of meeting men of the world on equal terms, Dr Koepfle was able, on the occasion of conferring with his compatriots, to pump up as much serviceable enthusiasm as assisted him to lead them in the right way, without either chilling their zeal or allowing himself to be carried away by it. With the harshness of youth, Mansfield suggested that an enthusiasm which could be folded up and put away so conveniently might merely be assumed on particular occasions; but Cyril told him that he had failed to

allow for the contagious influence of the emotion dominating a crowd.

At Trieste they fell in with a Zionist of a very different type, for here Rabbi Schaul had taken up his abode for a time, in order to bestow his blessing on the members of his flock now to be found on board every steamer leaving for Palestine. Sauntering down to the quay to look for their own vessel, Cyril and Mansfield found themselves accosted by a venerable white-bearded man in shabby robes of black, who raised his hands heavenwards and called down blessings in sonorous Hebrew on the head of the liberator of Israel, following up his words by bowing low enough to kiss the hem of Cyril's coat. Then turning to the Jews who stood around, gazing in astonishment at the homage paid by their renowned teacher to a Gentile, he explained to them in Jargon that when the Temple was rebuilt, and Messiah reigned in Jerusalem, this stranger would undoubtedly be admitted to the royal table as a guest, not as a servant like other Gentiles, and allowed to feast on the flesh of Leviathan, since it was owing to him that the desolations of Zion were about to be repaired. Mansfield listened, deeply moved, although he understood only a word here and there. He treasured up the incident for Philippa, wishing she could have witnessed it for herself, for he knew that its pathos would have touched her keenly. As for Cyril, he freed himself good-humouredly from the old man, waving aside the throng of disciples who were prepared to follow his example, and called to Mansfield to come on board quickly.

"You know, Rabbi, that I don't care to advertise myself," he said.

"But how are we to refrain from showing our gratitude to your Excellency?" asked Rabbi Schaul. "Here are all these sons of Israel leaving the house of bondage for the promised land, and many are gone already. Many more are going in the spring, and I myself among them. How can I forget

that, thanks to your Excellency, I shall in truth keep the Passover next year in Jerusalem?"

Cyril nodded pleasantly, and took refuge on board his steamer, where he expressed to Mansfield his satisfaction that Alexandria was their destination, and not Beyrout or Haifa, for which ports these fervid Zionists were bound.

In Egypt, indeed, there proved to be little that was fervid about the patriotism of the Jewish community. Its members were as business-like as Dr Koepfle, but with this difference—that they had their own interests in view, and not those of Zion. They treated the acquisition of Palestine purely as a matter of trade. Doubtless Count Mortimer had arranged with the Chevalier Goldberg to receive a due reward for his services, and, now that his work was over, he had nothing to do with the future of the country. It was the property of the United Nation Syndicate, and they would exploit it and make the most of its commercial capabilities for the benefit of the shareholders. It was a matter for grave discontent that the land was being colonised on such a large scale by the poor city-Jews of Europe, since the aim ought to have been to secure immigrants already accustomed to agricultural life, and not necessarily belonging to the Chosen Race. At present much time, and therefore money, was being wasted in teaching the new settlers and correcting their mistakes. Mansfield listened in sorrowful and wondering disgust while these prosperous people, themselves secure in their enjoyment of liberty and property under British rule, talked glibly of the Holy Land as an estate to be worked for their own advantage, without reference to the needs of their oppressed brethren. A scheme was even proposed, and largely discussed, for making the Holy Places more valuable from a pecuniary point of view, by means of judicious selection and rearrangement.

"It is so miserably mean and degraded!" Mansfield cried angrily to Cyril, who had rallied him on his sour looks. "These people have the romance of the ages behind them,

and the fulfilment of the prophecies just ahead, and they think of nothing but cent per cent!"

"You have been disillusioned, and you speak severely," said Cyril, with great sweetness. "I am thankful I never took the trouble to set up ideals, when I see how other people suffer in seeing theirs overthrown. But why don't you blame the tyranny of centuries, which has reduced the Jews to this lamentable condition? You know the old excuse, that because the Jew has been allowed to deal with nothing but money, he has come to think that nothing but money exists."

"But the Jew has allowed himself to be degraded."

"Oh, come, I see disappointment has made you merciless. Perhaps you may be induced to modify the rigour of your judgments before long. I shall be interested to see what you think of Herschel Rubenssohn, the Ghetto poet, when we meet him in Palestine. He was the pet of London society a year ago, and now he is a *bonâ fide* colonist."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHURCH MILITANT AND ORTHODOX.

IT was at a newly-established colony of Scythian Jews in the neighbourhood of Hebron that the travellers found Herschel Rubenssohn, roughly clad and labouring with his own hands like one of the *fellahin*. He had turned his back deliberately upon the days when English hearts had thrilled in response to his rehearsal of the tragedy of his race, and the Anti-Semites of the Continent had been lashed to frenzy by his cutting sarcasm. The pen was laid aside, and the poet was intent on the best methods of cultivating olives, and on finding new species of vines unaffected by the diseases which attacked those native to the country. Even these lowly tasks could not be performed in peace, for he was called upon incessantly to quell the disputes which arose among the pale-faced, gaberdined and ringleted denizens of the Ghetto who were his fellow-colonists. It was his duty, also, to act as interpreter for them with the Roumi authorities, and to mediate in the many misunderstandings that broke out between them and the peasants who worked for them. Cyril's invitation to dinner he accepted with unfeigned pleasure, confessing that when he left London he had little expected ever to regard an opportunity of donning evening dress as an occasion of rejoicing. The momentary return to the old life, which he had so often contemned, after the manner of poets, as false and

hollow, was a keen delight to him, and Mansfield found it hard to believe that the vague-eyed man of the world, who knew his London so thoroughly, could be one and the same with the industrious toiler of the morning. Presently, however, the curious effect produced by the contrast of the sun-burnt face with the whiteness of the forehead where the hat had shaded it attracted his attention. Looking more closely at the guest, he saw that his delicate hands were roughened and blistered within, and he conceived a growing admiration for the man who had voluntarily left a life of ease for one of toil, purely in the hope of setting an example to his nation.

But this admiration was not fated to endure very long. As Rubenssohn grew accustomed to the company in which he found himself, the vagueness left his eyes. In Cyril he discovered one who appealed to a different side of his nature, and a mocking spirit took possession of him. Mansfield and the melancholy Paschics listened with bated breath while the guest embarked upon a career of destruction, sparing neither the beliefs common to mankind generally nor those of his own people. He ridiculed with the utmost impartiality the ideas of love and immortality, the tyranny of the Law, and the Messianic hopes of Rabbi Schaul. The keen arrows of his wit played round each subject in turn, disclosing with cruel certainty the weak spot or the flaw. He made no attempt to deny the degradation of his people, and in Mansfield's view he proposed no remedy for it. He believed in the Jewish race, it seemed, and he accorded a qualified toleration to Judaism on account of its services in the preservation of the race, but his Judaism possessed neither prophecies nor the hope of a Messiah, and existed independently of any religious sanctions. Its ecclesiastical system had been evolved naturally enough during the progress of the race, and ascribed, as other nations ascribed their religions, to the guidance of a higher power. Freedom, toleration, a more natural mode of life, these things would in his view raise the Jews far above the level of other

nations, and then the old fetters which had held the race together might safely be shaken off. Mansfield thought of the prosperous Jews whom he had met at Alexandria, and who enjoyed all these blessings already, and his heart rose in revolt against Rubenssohn's philosophy. If this was to be the end, if the Jews had remained a separate people merely that in the end of the ages they might be better fed, clothed, housed, than the nations, throwing aside callously the prophecies which had cheered them and the faith that had sustained them in their sorrows, if they were to be bereft at once of hope and of religion, then the heaviest of their former woes would be a lighter curse than their new prosperity.

"I had rather be in the wrong with Lady Phil and Princess Soudaroff than in the right with Rubenssohn," he decided, remembering how often he had listened to the old lady as she expounded her views on the Jewish question and her interpretation of prophecy, Philippa at her side concurring enthusiastically in all that was said. This time, however, he did not confide his feelings to Cyril.

Jerusalem was the next place of interest to be reached, and Mansfield had mapped out for himself a very definite plan for occupying his leisure hours here. He intended to visit all the missionary establishments in and around the city in which Lady Caerleon was interested, and to photograph them and their inmates. Any spare time was to be devoted to views of Jerusalem itself, and by dint of these labours Mansfield hoped to provide a peace-offering which would not be unacceptable to Philippa's mother, and might even tend to soften her heart towards him. But his plans were interrupted, and his fair project brought to a premature conclusion, owing to the greed of human nature. No sooner was it known that Cyril had arrived in Jerusalem than his lodgings were fairly besieged. Jews, Mohammedans and Christians, Syrians, Levantines, Greeks, Albanians, European adventurers of all nations, crowded to wait upon him. Since the famous revelations of

Dr Texelius, so promptly contradicted by the Pannonian official papers, nothing had been said of Count Mortimer as a candidate for the governorship of Palestine, but there appeared to be a general feeling that the future of the country lay in the hands of this unpretending traveller, and the time-servers would not lose their opportunity. Some of them wanted concessions and some contracts, some Government offices and some commissions in the Jewish army or police, some wished merely to gain the general goodwill of the possible ruler, and some were anxious to confer benefits on him, in the shape of invitations to their houses, or gifts of horses, carpets, and works of art, without, of course, the slightest ulterior design. Cyril disappointed them grievously by refusing alike their favours and their requests, assuring them that he was simply an agent of the Syndicate, and Mansfield developed a prickly suspiciousness that made him distrust any one who addressed him civilly. This was the result of an adventure of his own. Pausing in a back street one day to photograph a picturesque archway, he was accosted by a respectable citizen, who invited him into his garden, where was to be seen a piece of ruined wall on which no tourist's eye had ever lighted. Mansfield accepted the invitation, took two or three photographs, and submitted to be regaled with coffee and sweetmeats, all before he discovered that his host had recognised him, and was anxious to obtain the contract for clothing the army of the Jewish State. Then he rose up and fled, with his faith in humanity sorely shattered, and kept rigidly to the beaten track until he was rejoiced by Cyril's decision to leave the city for a short time. Business was impossible while the envoy was so persistently mobbed, and it was advisable to pay a flying visit to Jericho, since a sheikh in the neighbourhood of that place had threatened to make himself disagreeable with regard to the fords of the Jordan.

It was clear that Cyril's movements must be kept to some extent a secret, if he was to conduct the negotiations with

the Roumi authorities, for which he had come, without being pursued into the very audience-chamber by the greedy throng of privilege-hunters. Accordingly, he put the matter into the hands of the Chevalier Goldberg's agent, who secured him quarters for the night at Jericho, in the house of a wealthy Jew, and despatched beforehand all that was necessary for comfort. In this way Mansfield and his employer were able to leave Jerusalem as if for a morning ride, and meeting, when out of sight of the city, the guide and escort provided for them, ride on at once to Jericho. The sight of the huge Scythian hospice, constructed of late years for the accommodation of pilgrims, suggested to Mansfield that their visit might have excited less remark in the place if they had sought a lodging there, but Cyril laughed at the idea.

"I didn't know you were so anxious to see the last of me," he said. "The monks would indeed think that their enemy was delivered into their hand, and it would be sheer ingratitude not to prepare a special cup of coffee for his benefit."

The sheikh proved more easy to deal with than had been expected, and Cyril and Mansfield spent the evening at his village, discussing in the most friendly spirit the various matters in dispute. As the guests rode back to their quarters, passing the great fountain called Ain-es-Sultan, Mansfield directed Cyril's attention to several lights which dotted the side of a precipitous mountain about a mile away.

"What can those be?" he said. "I didn't see any houses there by daylight."

"That must be Jebel Karantal, the Mount of Temptation," said Cyril, "and the lights come from the hermits' caves. We might ride over there in the morning, if you are anxious to see the holy men in their native dirt."

As Mansfield reflected that the picture of a real live hermit might help to console Philippa for all the photographs he

had not had time to take at Jerusalem, he accepted the offer gratefully, and did not fail to remind Cyril of it the next morning. They rode at an easy pace across the plain, with its thickets of tamarisk and thorn, starting so many partridges and other birds that the hunter's instinct awoke in Mansfield, and he lamented more than once that they were not spending several days at Jericho, so as to get a little shooting. Arrived at the foot of the path which led up the mountain, they found standing there a horse with a European saddle, in the charge of a native servant, who told their grooms that his master, a Frank gentleman, had started about half an hour ago to make the ascent.

"We are a little late," said Cyril. "Evidently this place is becoming popular as a tourist resort. I see a whole horde of Scythian pilgrims in the distance," and he pointed to a dingy mass of people, bearing banners and sacred pictures, and headed by two priests in shining vestments, that was approaching from the direction of Jericho. "But they are not likely to have brought cameras with them, and we must only hope for your sake, Mansfield, that our fellow-countryman has been equally forgetful."

Leaving their horses with the grooms, they began to make the ascent of the mountain, finding the only path that offered itself alarmingly narrow and steep. It grew worse instead of better higher up, and when they were between three and four hundred feet above the plain, Cyril wiped his heated brow and sat down upon a large stone which lay temptingly in the shadow of the rock, on a ledge into which the path widened at this point.

"I draw the line here, Mansfield. I may be getting old, but my life is valuable to me, and I don't feel justified in endangering it by any further breakneck feats. If you are conscious of a yearning to risk your neck on that giddy ascent in front, by way of emulating a fly walking up a wall, pray go on, and I will sit here and await developments. It will be

some consolation to your afflicted relatives that I am at hand to give your scattered remains decent burial."

Mansfield had been carrying his camera under his arm, but now he slung it over his shoulder by its strap, so as to leave his hands free, laughing as he did so, and applied himself to the further climb with heroic determination, steadfastly avoiding the temptation to look downwards. If his glance strayed for a moment from the almost perpendicular path to the sheer precipice below, he felt sure that nothing could save him from making personal acquaintance with its depths. Presently he came to another ledge, which formed the approach to the mouth of a cave, but glancing into the semi-darkness within the dwelling, he caught sight of a pith helmet. It was clear that the tourist whose horse they had seen below was talking to the hermit, and Mansfield seized joyfully the opportunity of outstripping him and reaching the summit first. Another terrific climb brought him to the foot of an unsafe-looking flight of wooden steps, at the top of which an elderly monk, very fat and very dirty, stood smiling hospitably. Mansfield unstrapped his camera and photographed him in the act, then accepted his beaming invitation to mount the steps to his cave. Here he took one or two more photographs, making gallant attempts the while to talk to his host in classical Greek pronounced in the modern fashion, and smiling broadly, by way of making his goodwill evident. His conversation or his smiles, or both, seemed to win the heart of the hermit, for he found himself invited, partly by signs, to sling the camera over his shoulder again, preparatory to climbing another dizzy ascent, at the summit of which was situated the rock-hewn chapel of which his host was the guardian. This was exactly what Mansfield was most anxious to see, and he accepted the invitation with alacrity, but stepped first to the edge of the little rock platform, in order to estimate its distance from the plain.

To his surprise the greater part of the way he had traversed

was clearly visible, and he could see Cyril peacefully smoking a cigar where he had left him. Receiving a wave of the hand in answer to his shout, he was about to follow his guide up the face of the rock, which at this point justified Cyril's comparison by appearing quite perpendicular, when his attention was attracted by the sight of a crowd of people gathered round the horses and their grooms at the foot of the hill. They were the Scythian pilgrims whom Cyril had pointed out to him, and they were buzzing round the horses like a swarm of angry bees. For a moment he thought they must be intending to steal them, then he told himself that the presence of the grooms would prevent that: the pilgrims were merely examining the novel English saddles. He began the ascent, but, before passing round a projecting rock which would cut off his view, he looked down again at the plain. The pilgrims had quitted the horses, and were rushing up the path in a confused mass, priests and people mixed together, one man only being a little in advance. Mansfield's heart misgave him, and he pointed out the crowd to the hermit; but it did not need the old man's raised hands and look of shocked surprise to tell him that the pilgrims should have mounted the hill in slow procession, singing solemn litanies, and not with this indecorous haste. Cyril's allusion of the day before to the monks of the Scythian hospice recurred to him, and, explaining hastily to the hermit that he must go back at once, he turned to retrace his steps. He tried to shout a warning from the platform in front of the cave; but it was evident that Cyril regarded his frenzied gestures merely as the result of an ebullition of animal spirits, for he waved his hand with the same placidity as before. Giving up the attempt to make himself understood, Mansfield addressed his energies afresh to the task of descending, which proved to be even more difficult and dangerous than that of ascending had been. He was out of sight of Cyril now; but before he

had covered half the distance that separated them, a sound mounted to his ear which made him hurl away his camera and dash headlong down the path, regardless of his own safety. It was the crack of a revolver, the sound of which travelled far in the clear air.

In the meantime, Cyril, smoking quietly on his fragment of rock, and all unconscious of danger, was disturbed by the noise of angry voices. Almost as they reached his ear, a haggard man, in the flat cap and long, dull-grey coat of the Scythian peasant, rushed round the corner of the path, and recoiled precipitately on catching sight of him.

"Odd!" said Cyril to himself. "Mad, perhaps," and mechanically his hand sought his revolver in its accustomed pocket. His fingers had scarcely closed upon it when the throng of pilgrims burst upon him with furious shouts, and he had barely time to set his back against the rocky wall before he found himself confronted by a semicircle of angry faces, clenched fists, and menacing clubs.

"Kill him! kill the renegade!" was the cry. "Kill the traitor, and save the Holy Places from the Jewish dogs!"

"You had better go on your way quietly," shouted Cyril in his best Scythian. "I am armed," and he drew out the revolver.

"There are stones enough!" cried a voice, and a man who had found a point of vantage flung a jagged piece of rock which struck Cyril on the temple. The sight of the flowing blood appeared to stimulate the ferocity of the mob, and deprive its members of such hesitation as they may have felt in throwing themselves upon a solitary man, for they sprang forward with a howl. Cyril had only time to fire one shot into the air, in the hope partly of attracting Mansfield's notice and partly of frightening his assailants, before his right arm was broken by a blow from a club as he raised the revolver, which dropped from his hand. Hustled, beaten, and knocked

about, the blood streaming from his face, he had one thing, and only one, in his favour, and this was that the pilgrims were so closely pressed together on the narrow ledge as to be unable to get him down and trample upon him. Presently he became aware that one of them, who must have caught it as it fell, was holding the revolver to his head. Before the trigger could be pulled, however, the voice of a priest, who had mounted upon the fragment of rock upon which the victim had been sitting, rang like a trumpet across the din.

“No shots! no shots! Will you give the heathen Roumis cause to accuse us of murder? Throw the apostate over the precipice, so that it may not be known whose hand executed judgment upon him.”

The man who held the revolver tossed it away reluctantly, and joined with the rest in attempting to hustle Cyril to the edge of the path. Crippled as he was, he fought savagely, contesting every inch of ground, determined not to give his assailants the opportunity of seizing him and hurling him down headlong. “If I go over, I won’t go alone,” was the thought in his mind; and he fixed on a huge fellow, whose efforts to catch him up bodily he had successfully foiled, as the companion whom he would clutch with his last strength and drag to destruction in his company. The unequal struggle was approaching its only possible end as Cyril was driven farther and farther from the rock. The pilgrims nearest the brink were beginning to edge away to the right and left in order to secure their own safety, thereby lessening the pressure on that side and adding to the force arrayed against the doomed man, when a bullet whizzed past Cyril’s ear and buried itself in the shoulder of the giant on whom he had decided as his comrade in the fatal plunge.

“Bravo, Mansfield!” Cyril gathered breath to shout; but before the words were out of his mouth there was another shot, and the club fell from an uplifted hand which was

brandishing it over his head. Crack! crack! crack! came the sharp whip-like reports, and man after man pushed his way, cursing, out of the mass, each effectually disabled for the time, but not one mortally wounded so far as Cyril could see.

"Mansfield never fired those shots!" was his mental comment, as the number of his assailants continued to diminish, until only a few remained on the ledge, making no attempt to molest him, but looking about in bewilderment to see where the shots came from.

"Git!" said a stentorian voice which seemed to resound from overhead, and the crestfallen pilgrims, grasping the meaning of the monosyllable, embraced with thankfulness the permission accorded them to retire. Once safely round the corner of the rock, they collected their wounded and made their way down the hill. The speaker—a lean, elderly man in white clothes and a pith helmet—kept them covered with his revolver until they were out of sight, then let himself lightly down to the path, and approached Cyril, who had sunk on the ground in perilous proximity to the edge of the precipice.

"Well, sir?" he asked slowly.

"I am infinitely indebted to you," said Cyril, looking up with difficulty as his rescuer reached him.

"Not you, sir," was the prompt reply. "When I saw those Scythian cusses preparing a new Holy Place for themselves by conducting a Christian martyrdom on this spot, it struck me that Scythia had quite as many Holy Places in this territory as was healthy for her, so I just started in with my six-shooter right away. You bet it went to my heart not to lay out two or three of the fellows, and specially the reverend gentleman that took the rock for a pulpit; but I know the ways of the Roumi authorities, and I didn't want my business interrupted by a judicial inquiry any more than you would. But I guess there's a dozen or so that will carry

about with 'em for some time a pleasing little souvenir of me, any way."

While the stranger spoke, he had been helping Cyril gently back to his former seat on the stone, and now began to bind up the wound in his head with a handkerchief.

"Surely I know your voice?" said Cyril faintly. "It seems quite familiar, and yet I can't recall where I have heard it."

The rescuer ceased his work, and stepped back for a moment. "The same as ever!" he exclaimed in admiration. "Sir, I have many a time heard you called the first gentleman in Europe, but I never expected you would remember me, when the last deal we did together was over twenty years ago."

"Mr Hicks of the 'Crier'?" asked Cyril, with an uncertain smile.

"Sir, you are correct. Elkanah B. Hicks, of the 'Empire City Crier,' who would be sitting in the head office of that paper as news editor at this moment if he was not a fool. But he has got the wandering strain in his blood, and threw up his berth to come out here, with the excuse that it needed the best man the paper had got to fathom you, Count."

"I am flattered. Then it was not Turkish you spoke just now?"

"No, sir. I dispersed that crowd by means of the beautiful language which is the common heritage of your nation and mine. Do you find yourself comfortably fixed now, Count?"

He stepped back again to look critically at his work, just as Mansfield, with blazing eyes and panting breath, charged down upon the ledge, revolver in hand.

"Thank God you're safe, sir!" he cried, with something like a sob. "Where are the villains?"

"Hold him, Hicks!" cried Cyril feebly, as his secretary

dashed past him in the direction taken by the fugitives. "He is suffering from the usual British malady, and yearns to go and kill something. He isn't safe."

"Young man," said Mr Hicks, flinging his sinewy arms round the intending avenger, and holding him fast, "the bugle has sounded the 'cease fire,' and I guess you had better obey. Here's your boss with a broken arm and pretty near bleeding to death, and no doctor in this forsaken locality but the one at the Scythian hospice. I reckon we won't requisition his services, but I shall want your help if I am to fix things myself, old campaigner though I am. Give me that shooting-iron for the present. Those things have a nasty trick of going off of themselves when a young fellow is seeing red."

Sobered by Mr Hicks's speech, and very much ashamed of his temporary madness, Mansfield surrendered his revolver, and returned to Cyril's side, feeling an irresistible inclination to choke.

"My dear youth, don't be an idiot," said Cyril, and the lump in Mansfield's throat vanished instantly. He even laughed, in a husky and shame-faced manner.

"That's better," said Mr Hicks. "Take this chunk of wood, my young friend, and split it in two, if you have a knife about you." He handed him one of the broken clubs with which the pilgrims had been armed instead of the regulation staves, and Mansfield succeeded in obtaining two fairly suitable pieces of wood, rounded on one side and flat on the other. The surgeon continued to improve the occasion even while the operation of setting the broken arm was proceeding, talking meditatively as he worked, perhaps with the benevolent intention of diverting the patient's thoughts from what was going on.

"Yes, young man, I like your face, and I guess I don't object to your grit; but you'll have to learn how to take things. A week as a special in war time would teach you

a thing or two. What's happened to that kodak of yours, now? I saw you figuring around with it while I was interviewing the old nigger who calls himself a saint up there. You hurled it away, did you, just as if it was a rock? and all the pictures with it that you had concluded to take home to your best girl? Now what a wicked waste! Pull, pull harder; that's right. Keep cool, young man; the frozen deep is not a circumstance to the coolness you want before you'll make a good man at a pinch."

With such cheerful counsels as these Mr Hicks lightened the gloom of the painful process he had in hand, but Mansfield scarcely heard them, in his anxiety for Cyril. At last the patient opened his eyes and said, "Don't be too hard on him, Hicks. He's a good chap all round." The busy surgeon nodded.

"I guess I'd turn him out a better if I had him on the 'Crier' staff," he said; but when the work was over, and Mansfield had gone to fetch the servants, that they might lend their aid in carrying Cyril down the path, Mr Hicks smiled confidentially at his patient.

"That young man has a heart of gold, sir, and worships your very shadow. It's not his fault that he hasn't enjoyed my experience, though it might have been awkward for you if I hadn't chanced to be wandering around in these parts. I guess, if you'll allow me, that I'll fix my camp next to yours while you stay at Jericho. The wily Scythian will find that it's another story when he has to do business with Elkanah B. Hicks."

CHAPTER XIII.

A GROUND OF HOPE.

CYRIL'S troubles were by no means over when he had been carried across the plain to Jericho, with infinite difficulty, upon a litter made by tying branches together with handkerchiefs and turbans. His Jewish host listened with a terrified countenance to the story of the attack, and although he did not actually entreat his guests to quit his roof, he expressed dismal apprehensions as to its safety if they remained under its shelter. Finding that they did not take the hint, he withdrew to lament the state of affairs with his family, if the sounds of weeping and wailing that followed were to be accepted as evidence. Mansfield was disposed to ridicule his conduct as the result merely of constitutional cowardice, but Mr Hicks pointed out to him the strong probability that the man's fears were well founded. A second band of pilgrims was expected that evening at the Scythian hospice, and it was not in human nature that the morning's assailants, thus reinforced, should resist the temptation to wipe out their defeat. That motive would be sufficient, even without the hope of killing the man whom they regarded honestly and with full conviction as Antichrist. Clearly there was no time to be lost, and after a visit to the authorities, which resulted in their posting a ragged and half-armed guard about the house, Mansfield started on a hurried ride

to Jerusalem to consult the Chevalier Goldberg's agent. It was with no small reluctance that he consented to leave Cyril, even though Mr Hicks had sworn to fight in his defence until the house fell in ruins around them. Still, not only the lives of the party but the future of the Jewish cause hung upon this day's doings, and since Cyril was unable to decide upon the steps to be taken, the Chevalier was the most suitable person to do so.

In the course of the night Mansfield returned, half-dead with fatigue, but accompanied by an escort of soldiers, and provided with full directions for the future. Cyril was to be carried in a mule-litter to an estate belonging to the Chevalier at Urtas, some miles to the south of Jerusalem, where he could remain in safety until he was well again. The agent would send out furniture and provisions, and see that the place was properly guarded, and neither the hostile pilgrims nor the Jerusalem concession-hunters were to be allowed to know where their victim had taken refuge. A rest of an hour or so was all that was granted to Mansfield and the soldiers, for Cyril's host was on thorns to get him out of the house. Mr Hicks, who had tacitly invited himself to remain in medical charge of the patient, ordered a start soon after daybreak, and Mansfield and he heaved a sigh of relief as they left the house, only less fervent than that of the Hebrew who had succeeded in getting rid of them. The travellers took the road to Jerusalem, but turned southwards before reaching the city, and continued in that direction until they arrived at the boundary of the Chevalier's estate. Here the steward, at the head of a well-armed body of gardeners and husbandmen, welcomed the visitors in his master's name, and the escort, their duty performed, accepted a hearty meal and sundry presents, and returned to Jerusalem.

Life at Urtas was at once business-like and unconventional. The estate was practically a huge botanical garden, in which

experiments were made in acclimatising foreign plants and improving by scientific cultivation the products of the country. The house was merely a large native dwelling, of no great pretensions, but the agent had sent out from Jerusalem a wealth of rich carpets, bright-hued draperies, and luxurious cushions, together with the irreducible minimum of European furniture, as represented by a shaky table and four assorted chairs. His care had even gone so far as to provide a Greek cook and a box of books, the latter principally French and Italian novels of an unimproving tendency. During the first few days Cyril was unable to do anything but recline upon the cushioned divans and enjoy the Oriental luxury of his surroundings, but before long the effect of the shock he had received passed away, together with certain feverish symptoms which had alarmed Mr Hicks at Jericho. Considerably before he could fairly be called convalescent he was as busy as ever, although his broken arm forbade him to write for himself. Every day the agent forwarded from Jerusalem a huge pile of letters and telegrams, dealing with all the complicated issues raised by the political situation, and Cyril dictated the answers from his divan while Mansfield and Paschics, who had joined the party from Jerusalem, took it in turns to write, and Mr Hicks lounged in the verandah, looking in at the workers now and then with a benevolent caution not to overdo things. When the letters were finished, Paschics, who was less likely to be recognised than either his colleague or the American, would ride with them to Jerusalem, often bringing back a second instalment of correspondence with him in the evening.

Nothing relating to the affairs of Zion could be settled without Cyril's advice, for the political barometer showed one of the curious lulls which the wise in such matters consider to herald an approaching storm. The Powers, cajoled, bribed, or threatened one by one into submitting to the Jewish

acquisition of Palestine, were waiting, all dissatisfied but each reluctant to be the first to move, to see what the Jews would do. At the New Year the control of the Holy Places was to be handed over to the consular body, as representing united Christendom, and the Roumi officials would give place to a Jewish provisional government, under the suzerainty of the Grand Seignior. The formation of this Cabinet, as it might be called, was one of the most delicate tasks before the leaders of the movement. In order to uphold the theory of representative institutions, dear to the hearts of Dr Koepfle and his school, it was necessary that the members should be formally elected by the Children of Zion throughout the world, voting according to their "tents" or lodges. Whether representative institutions stood or fell, however, it was obviously indispensable that the persons chosen should not be obnoxious to the Powers, and should be willing to maintain friendly, even respectful, relations with the United Nation Syndicate. Cyril's Balkan experience had left him little to learn in the matter of conducting an election from above, and it was to him that harassed wire-pullers appealed in every difficulty. Frantic telegrams poured in upon him when a "tent" refused steadily to vote for the candidate recommended to it by headquarters, or when all the "tents" of one country plumped for Dr Texelius, who was not one of the official candidates, to the huge delight of the Anti-Semitic press, or when, as happened in England, those Jews who were opposed to political Zionism made a vigorous attempt to capture all the "tents" of the country, with the view of electing a reactionary Cabinet. The wire-pullers did not appeal in vain, and even Mr Hicks was moved to admiration by Cyril's strategy, giving it as his opinion that Tammany could afford to learn a trick or two from Thracia.

The result of the election was to fill the prospective Cabinet with men holding moderate views and willing to be guided; and if they were virtually the nominees of Cyril and

the Syndicate, this fact was not likely to make the task of government less easy, but rather the reverse. Cyril could not but be aware, although he gave no sign of having perceived the fact, that to the Jews who were now crowding into Palestine he was the Moses of this second Exodus. They were coming, not with a wild rush, but in orderly bands, each family or individual selected by the "tent" to which it or he belonged, and allowed to start only when the necessary land had been secured in Palestine. The genius of Dr Koepfle directed this migration with almost mathematical accuracy; but Cyril's name bulked far more largely before the world than his, and there could be little doubt that when the immigrants were invited to designate by means of a *plébiscite* the man who should rule them, they would vote unanimously for Count Mortimer.

But this consummation, however devoutly to be wished, was at present merely in the clouds. The Constitution which was to be administered by the provisional government had been drawn up by the foremost Jewish jurists—which is almost equivalent to saying the principal Continental lawyers—and had gone the round of the Powers for approval and criticism. It guaranteed freedom of conscience, freedom of trade, and every political blessing that the human heart could in theory desire, to people of all creeds and all nationalities, and yet the Powers were not satisfied, although no one could suggest any improvement. The lowering state of the political sky carried Cyril's mind back to the days when Caerleon and he had held the fort in Thracia, alone against Europe, and when the only thing that saved them from annihilation was the mutual jealousy of the Powers. "Nothing will succeed here but success," he said to himself, as he had said then. "While each of them is waiting to see what the rest will do, we may pull the thing through." And he chafed the more under the physical weakness which kept him tied at Urtas, when he might

have been putting his fortune to the touch, and gaining not only the position which his Jewish friends desired for him, but also the happiness which up to this point he had contrived to miss in his life.

Mansfield was very happy during this sojourn at Urtas. His work was hard and the hours long, but he found time for a good deal of out-door recreation. The agent had provided horses for the party, of a very different type from the serviceable beasts which they had procured for their journeys, and Mansfield loved all horses; while in the estate and the model farm he found a whole world of delight. The steward, a shrewd and ponderous Dutch Jew, told him when he heard of his path in life that he was a good farmer spoilt, but Mansfield was quite content to regard farming as merely a holiday amusement. It would not bring him nearer to Philippa, which was what he hoped his secretaryship would do.

Sometimes Mr Hicks would join him in his rides, and generally on these occasions they went hunting, as the natives called it, dignifying with this lofty name a little quail- and partridge-shooting, for Mansfield drew the line at shooting a fox, much to the disappointment of his attendants. It was on their return from one of these rides that the American said casually—

“Say, Mr Mansfield, not come to any notion yet what your boss has got on his mind, have you?”

“On his mind?” repeated Mansfield, in astonishment. “Nothing more than the work and the political situation, I suppose.”

“I guess that would be about enough for most men,” said Mr Hicks grimly; “but there’s something else wrong with him. He’s just pining to make tracks from this place right now.”

“I haven’t noticed it,” said Mansfield, intending the remark as a snub.

"You bet your life you haven't, Mr Mansfield. You weren't meant to."

"But what is it?" Mansfield turned to face his tormentor; "and how do you know anything about it?"

"Well, sir, if you saw a man fretting like a spirited horse to find himself held fast in one place, and working all he knew to keep himself from thinking, and all the time taking no proper pleasure in his work or anything, what would be your opinion of that man?"

"He might be in fear of his life,"—this was intended to be sarcastic; "or he might"—reluctantly—"be in love."

"Sir, you have hit the very central point of the bull's-eye. That's what's wrong with the boss."

"I don't see that it concerns you if it is."

"There's no lady in Palestine that he might have been on his way to interview?" continued Mr Hicks imperturbably.

"You mean that Queen—Queen Ernestine of Thracia?" asked Mansfield blankly. Could it be possible that the moral problem Cyril had propounded to him before leaving Ludwigsbad had been based upon Cyril's own experience?

"That's my notion," was the cheerful reply.

"But why wait so long, and go so far round?"

"Because he's half ashamed of coming back to her anyhow, and half of being so long about it," said Mr Hicks concisely.

"I don't see how you know that."

"Sir, I was at Bellaviste when King Michael came of age. You bet I made things hum in New York with my reports of the festivities, and the other specials had to fly around to get even with me, but when it came to Count Mortimer's dismissal the 'Crier' fairly took the cake. The hours I spent hanging around at that Palace, working up all the ins and outs of the affair from the servants and minor officials! But it paid, sir, it paid. I wrote up the incident for the paper in my most elegant style—real high-toned dramatic situations, heart-rending pathos, and all the rest. I tell you, Mr

Mansfield, those sheets were wet with the scalding tears of the most beautiful women in America. The Four Hundred was divided; half the ladies took the Queen's side, and half the Count's—and where will you find a stronger testimony to the fairness with which I had done my work? There wasn't a likeness of either of 'em left in a single store from one end of the Union to the other. And having gone into the case to that extent, you tell me I'm not even in the ring!"

"By the bye," said Mansfield, still impenitent, "what miles of interviews you must be sending off to your paper every day now!"

"I am doing my duty to the 'Crier,' sir. I was sent out to keep an eye on all the proceedings in this transfer of Palestine, in which my country has as large an interest as yours, and I am informed that all the Churches in the States are subscribing to the paper since my descriptive articles on the crisis started to appear. There's not a half-starved home missionary or a New Rush school-ma'am out West but cherishes the hope of seeing Palestine before sending in their checks at last, and they all calculate to have a share in the country. We are giving 'em what they want—not a move in this high political game but they hear of it, and if intelligent interest was allowed any weight, the territory would be ours. But since it's not likely that your played-out old Powers will conclude to appoint America the guardian of Palestine, as they ought to do if they want the property developed to any extent, why, I am booming your boss all I know. When the pinch comes, the great American nation will hurl itself solid on the side of Cyril de B. Mortimer, and it would not surprise me if he took his stand under the fostering wings of the American eagle. He knows who are his friends, and would as lief do a deal with 'em in a friendly spirit as not. He gives me an item or two most every day for my paper, and is ready all the time to favour me with his opinions,—not like some of your fine old crusted diplomats, who wouldn't open

their mouths to save their lives. Now there was Sir Dugald Haigh, a real petrified old chunk of British oak, no less. I was in Ethiopia for the paper at the time of his Mission, close upon fifteen years ago now, and not a word to be got out of any of 'em. Kept me fooling around the servants' quarters, trying to find out what they were doing, and wasting my valuable time. Well, there's something mysterious about these things, any way——"

"Well?" asked Mansfield, for Mr Hicks had paused darkly.

"Well, sir, that Mission was next door to a failure."

"Perhaps that was not altogether the fault of the Ethiopians, was it?"

"Mr Mansfield, I guess I'm a white man. You don't find me taking sides with niggers against my own colour. No, sir. The fat was just saved by Mr Stratford, the second in command (he's Sir Egerton now and your Ambassador at Czarigrad), who snatched it out of the fire when we were all making our wills, but Sir Dugald had no hand in it. And now, instead of prancing around in a coronet and ermine robes in the House of Lords, that old man is buried up in Scotland somewhere, cultivating oatmeal and a little literature—that is to say, he makes himself a general nuisance by writing to the 'Times' when there's any question on hand connected with foreign politics."

"Well?" asked Mansfield again.

"Well, sir, the boss is not that sort. He knows where the pay-dirt lies, as I said, and things will pan out as he means 'em to. If he concludes that he didn't treat the lady you mentioned handsomely, he may go back to her, but if he does, it'll be because it suits his book."

"Look here," said Mansfield, "if you go on making these vile insinuations against him any more, you and I shall quarrel."

"You bet!" was the unsympathetic reply. "No, sir, when

a man finds himself able to hitch his conscience and his convenience to his waggon together, all that the public can do is to admire his team. Why it should turn ugly and make nasty remarks on the harness I don't know, and you won't find me doing it."

Mr Hicks swung himself off his horse as he spoke, with the air of one who dismissed the subject, for they had ridden up to the house, but Mansfield had been too much disturbed by the new ideas suggested to him to be able to banish the conversation from his mind. When work was over that evening, instead of going out as usual for a second ride, he hung about the room in which he had been writing at Cyril's dictation, alternately rearranging his papers and trying to place Cyril's cushions more comfortably.

"Well, Mansfield, what is it?" asked his employer at last.

"I thought—I didn't know—it occurred to me that you might want a message taken to—to some other part of the country, as you are tied here," stammered Mansfield.

"You are very considerate. A message to whom?"

"To the—to some one you were particularly anxious to see."

"Come, Mansfield, out with it! Who is this mysterious person? Has Hicks been pulling your leg?"

"I knew he had made it all up!" burst joyfully from Mansfield.

"All what? I am afraid not. Did he tell you that I was on my way to ask for an interview with Queen Ernestine, when the pilgrims interfered with my plans?"

"Yes, but I didn't believe him."

"Cultivate a more credulous spirit. What he told you was perfectly true, and so was his further information that this delay is almost intolerable to me."

"I'll start to-night," said Mansfield, reproaching himself deeply.

"You can do nothing, unfortunately. I must see the

Queen myself, and approach her *in formâ pauperis*. You know that I treated her shamefully?"

"No. You can't make me believe that."

"But it is true, you see. King Michael behaved to her badly enough, but it was not that which drove her into exile in Syria. She would have gone with me cheerfully to poverty and obscurity in England, but I would not take her. She entreated me on her knees, but I refused to listen."

Cyril spoke in a hard, even voice, and when he ceased there was silence in the room. Mansfield tried in vain to think of something to say, and each moment made the silence harder to interrupt. "I would never have believed it if any one else had told me," he groaned at last, breaking the spell with a mighty effort.

"I knew that. You and I have taken a fancy to one another, Mansfield, and I was curious to see what you would say when you knew how I had treated the woman——"

"Who loved you," supplied Mansfield, in a tone which was at once harsh and dull.

"And whom I loved."

There was a further silence, then Mansfield came hesitatingly forward.

"I can't help it," he said. "I should never have thought I could speak civilly to a man who had done such a thing as that, but—it's you."

"My dear Mansfield!" The reaction from the strained feeling of the moment before forced a smile from Cyril. Mansfield sitting in judgment upon him, and allowing his just severity to be biassed by his affection for the culprit, was very funny. "You hate the sin, but you have a sneaking kindness left for the sinner, eh?"

Mansfield laughed uncomfortably, and Cyril shook his head.

"I am afraid I shall have to send you back to England, Mansfield. You must be deteriorating horribly, if you can

condone such a departure from your creed, even in my case. I suppose I have corrupted you. What would Lady Phil say?"

"I shall never tell her. It would make her too miserable—about you, I mean. But, Count——"

"Go on. I will relieve your wounded feelings in any way I can."

"You were intending to—to try and get the Queen to be reconciled?"

"Before there was any idea of its being to my advantage? Yes."

"And you mean to do it still? You think she will forgive you?"

"The woman I used to know would forgive me. But suppose she is changed? I have no right to expect anything else, and I have only myself to thank. There is just one thing——"

"Yes?" said Mansfield eagerly.

"Some time ago I was shown a photograph of her, taken since she left Europe. The woman who showed it to me would have been the last person in the world to wish to give me any hope, but she did not see the significance of what I noticed. On the Queen's arm there was a bracelet——"

"Which you had given her?"

"Not quite. Prince Mirkovics's daughter, one of her *Hof-damen*, gave it to her once at Christmas. It had one very large diamond in it, and to the uninitiated that was all. But the diamond was so cut that by looking at it at a certain angle you could see a portrait in the setting behind it. The Queen was delighted."

"And it was your portrait? and she was wearing it still?"

"She was wearing it still. That is my sole ground of hope. But why I should be pouring out my sorrows to you in this way, like young Werther or the celebrated Mr Rochester, I

don't know. It isn't for a warning, because I can't by any stretch of imagination conceive you to be in need of it, and it certainly isn't because I was yearning for a confidant. It must have been simply your astonishing cheek in leading up to the subject. Well, now your idol is broken, and I hope you are pleased."

"I can't think what made me do it," said Mansfield, awkwardly. "I know I must seem disgustingly inquisitive to you, but I only wanted to—to——"

"To annihilate time and space for my benefit, I know. Well, don't distress yourself. I could have shut you up at any moment I chose. As I said, I wished to see whether you would quite turn your back upon me when you knew the whole truth."

"I could never do that, whatever happened. Try me."

"I believe you. And now, if you have probed into my past history sufficiently, perhaps you would not mind going round to the steward's and seeing what he has to say about the mule-litter that Hicks mentioned this morning?"

Mr Hicks himself entered the room as Mansfield stumbled out of it, and cast a glance of quizzical reproof at Cyril as he sat down on the divan.

"I'd lay my last red cent, Count, that you've been tormenting that unhappy young man again. The way you work upon his finer feelings is the cruellest thing I ever saw. You play upon him like an organ."

"Then why does he lend himself to it?" asked Cyril. "It's not in human nature to neglect such an opportunity. The luckless youth is provokingly sane otherwise. My brother values his opinion, my nephew and niece look up to him devoutly; I believe he even fancies himself a little as a man of the world. Why should he take it into his head to conceive such an adoration for me that he becomes like a child in my hands? I can make him blush and stammer like a girl, and for no reason whatever."

"He don't get much show out of his adoration, sir, any way."

"No, indeed; and yet he keeps it up. Why does a woman torment her lovers, Hicks? To show her power, I suppose—not necessarily because she delights in seeing them miserable. It gives me a kind of pleasure, no doubt, to know that I can raise the unfortunate Mansfield from despair to the seventh heaven by a word, and plunge him down into the depths again by another, and therefore I do it."

"Guess you are keeping your hand in, Count, against the time they fix you up with a whole territory to practise your fascinations upon."

"Don't dabble in prophecy, Hicks, unless you want to postpone that desirable time until the Greek Kalends. So poor Mansfield is tortured to make a pastime for me, is he? Well, it will be all made up to him. I intend him to marry my niece, and she takes after her father, and could not hurt any one's feelings in cold blood to save her life."

"Is that so, Count? Well, Mr Mansfield will have earned his happiness," said Mr Hicks drily. "But I guess you know some folks have figured it out that the young lady is to marry the King of Thracia? Old Prince Mirkovics is flying round putting the kingdom in order, and whispering the secret to most every one he meets. You are not in it, then?"

"Scarcely. For one thing, I don't think my niece would come into the scheme, and I am not so foolish as to undertake to marry her to any one against her will. And then, you see, I am retained, as I said, in Mansfield's behalf."

CHAPTER XIV.

NO PLACE OF REPENTANCE.

THE sojourn at Urtas, which had proved so irksome to Cyril, was not doomed to last much longer. As soon as the watchful Mr Hicks could be induced, against his better judgment, to allow him to travel, he was on the road again, riding whenever it was possible. When the country was so rough as to render horse exercise unsafe for a rider able only to use one hand, he was content to be conveyed ignominiously in the mule-litter. In his train followed Mr Hicks, acting both as surgeon and chronicler. Cyril was well pleased to keep the American supplied with exclusive information on points of general interest, since he found him prepared to exercise a wise discretion with regard to matters of real importance. Mr Hicks asked no more favourable treatment than this. He had been sent out to write up the Palestine question for the 'Crier,' and how could he do so better than by encamping continually, so to speak, close to the fountain-head of information on the subject? His retinue, added to Cyril's, made an imposing cavalcade, and the local governors and petty sheikhs honoured with a visit were duly impressed.

The minds of these functionaries were found to be much perturbed, owing to the reports which had been spread as to the intentions of the new government, and it was sometimes a long business to reassure them. Curiously enough, the

worst and most malevolent of the mischief-makers were the Jews whose families had been settled in the larger towns for two or more generations. Supported in idleness by means of the Chalukah—a kind of voluntary tax which the Jews throughout the world imposed on themselves for the benefit of their poor brethren in Palestine—these men, quite naturally, were fully satisfied with the present. The prospect of a future in which their pretensions would be examined and their privileges curtailed was not enticing. Hard work in stubborn soil, even on land which was their own, would be a poor exchange for ease and idleness, and these degenerate Israelites did their best to avert it by inciting the Moslems to resist the change of rule. Calumny after calumny was brought forward by the local authorities, and refuted by Cyril, who made his way to the hardest hearts by dint of a judicious combination of *bonhomie* and *bakhshish*. It is true that the natives, having seen the colour of his money, and heard of the liberty and other blessings in store for them, chose to ignore the existence of the Jewish State altogether. However, since they accepted all Cyril's suggestions, and agreed to pay their taxes to the officials whom he should appoint, their belief that England was about to take possession of the country, and had sent him in advance as her representative, mattered little.

Owing to the singular success of his labours, Count Mortimer's journey through the country bore the aspect of a triumphal progress. When he arrived at length at Damascus, there remained only the Beni Ismail and their Desert Queen to be placated before he could announce that the whole Moslem population of Palestine was well affected towards the new rule. To gain the goodwill of the Christians was a hopeless task, he knew; but at this moment they were all fully occupied in intriguing, with the support of the consuls of the Powers who protected them respectively, for the aggrandisement of their property or prestige at the expense

of rival sects. Even Bishop Philaret had forgotten the iniquities of the Jews for a time, and was so hotly engaged in a controversy with the Latins over a piece of ground some seven feet square, in which a ruined cistern (which he imagined to be a tomb) had been discovered, that he had no leisure to waste in attacking Cyril.

As the travellers approached Damascus, it seemed to Mansfield and Mr Hicks that their pace was faster than it had been at first. Cyril had become more impatient of delay, less tolerant of any proposal to digress from the appointed route for the purpose of visiting some object of interest. They could see that his spirits were variable, in spite of the rigid self-control which he exercised, and his physician discovered that for the first time in his life he slept badly night after night. When they reached the city, however, and had taken up their quarters in the house of an Oriental cousin of the Chevalier's, he was calm and cheerful again. On the first evening of their stay he was the life of the party, which included a cheerful young Roumi aide-de-camp of the Vali or Governor-General, who was the bearer of his superior's respects and compliments. When the story of their journeys had been told, Mahmud Fadil Bey had a good deal to say about the one task that remained to be completed.

"We are all anxious to see how you get on with the Beni Ismail," he said, in his excellent French. "They have been a thorn in our side for many a day, and we shall not be sorry to turn them over to you."

"What is their peculiar wickedness?" asked Cyril.

Mahmud Fadil shrugged his shoulders. "They are simply an Arab tribe who inhabit a tract of desert of which almost nothing is known, and who make themselves rather more disagreeable than the rest. Of course they have never paid any tribute—though our treasury officials devised a pleasing fiction that the arrears had been accumulating for centuries. It was practically a case of our paying tribute to them.

When the usual presents were not forthcoming, it was not long before we heard that the Beni Ismail had robbed a caravan or two. It was no use sending soldiers after them, for they knew the desert and we did not, so we lay low and said nothing." He glanced smilingly at Mr Hicks, as he made the quotation in English. "Two years ago there was a famine, and I suppose caravans became scarce. At any rate, the Beni Ismail were foolish enough to wander close to the city in search of food, and the Vali saw his opportunity. He drew a cordon of troops round their encampment, and arrested them for non-payment of their taxes. We had very nearly the whole tribe in our hands, and it was intended to deport them to some other part of the country, where they would be absolutely at the mercy of the Government. But, somehow or other, they managed to pay up, though I will do the Vali the justice to say that he did not diminish the sum he had named by a single piastre. This tardy virtue was all very well; but he had no intention of leaving the tribe at liberty to begin their old game again, and the preparations for removing them were going forward, when — of all people — the Pannonian Ambassador at Czarigrad took up the affair. It was said that the Empress of Pannonia was interesting herself in the creatures, though why she should I don't know, but we were obliged to let them go, on the understanding that the taxes should be paid in future, and the attacks on caravans cease. Wonderful to relate, they have kept their promise, thanks, I suppose, to their Queen, whom no one had ever heard of before they got into trouble. It seems that she holds her Court at some spot in the desert that the Arabs call Sitt Zeynab. She had been wise enough to keep out of our reach, and we restored her subjects to her."

"Do you mean that the lady's existence had been absolutely unsuspected?" asked Cyril.

"Absolutely. It was supposed that the tribe were ashamed to confess they were ruled by a woman, or perhaps afraid

that we should make a bold dash and secure her as a hostage. I believe the idea of appealing to the Empress was hers, though it is a mystery why she should hit upon Pannonia as the friend in need."

"But has no one from Damascus ever seen her?"

"No one. Moreover, I have questioned different members of the tribe, when they came to bring their tribute, since that time, and I think very few of them have seen her either. I have been assured by one man that she is ineffably old and practises magic, and by the next that she is a perfect *hourri* in youth and beauty. The most credible thing I have heard is that she is always wrapped in a white sheet, like the Druse ladies, that she is attended only by women, and that no one has ever seen her face. The tribe speak of her as the Great Princess, and her word is law. She is a splendid horse-woman, and she lives in a haunted palace, and both these things impress them very much."

"Is that so, sir?" said Mr Hicks. "And why do you expect this interesting female to come to blows with his Excellency, if I may ask?"

Mahmud Fadil laughed. "I am afraid we are to blame for that. When the last tribute came in, the Vali told the messengers that they might think themselves independent if they liked, but let them wait until the Prince of the Jews came, and see what all the Emperors in Europe could do for them then! They asked innumerable questions, and got all the information of the same kind we could give them, and retired to tell their Princess, saying that she would know what to do."

"I think this will involve a visit to her Highness as soon as we have had two or three days' rest and a look at Lebanon," said Cyril.

"I hardly think you will get as far as Sitt Zeynab," laughed the aide-de-camp. "No one has ever yet reached it from Damascus, though many have tried, some out of

curiosity, and some for other reasons. The Beni Ismail alone among the Arabs know the way, and they will never take any one there. Once or twice we have caught one of the tribe off his guard, and forced him to take charge of an exploring party, but the explorers have always returned unsuccessful and without their guide, after wandering very uncomfortably in the desert for a few days. It is difficult to see how the place can be reached. We have offered a reward to the Beni Ayub, a rival tribe, if they will find out the way to it, but whenever the Beni Ismail discover trespassers in their country, they cut their trespassing severely short. The town does not seem to have been visited by any traveller, and the other Arabs cannot even say how long the Queen has reigned."

"Decidedly we must face these perils and make a dash for Sitt Zeynab," repeated Cyril; "but I intend to spend to-morrow in exploring Anti-Lebanon."

When the next day arrived, however, Mr Hicks came into Mansfield's room early in the morning, and roused him unceremoniously from a sound sleep.

"Hullo! am I late?" asked the victim vaguely. "I'll be down in a minute. Does the Count want to start already?"

"I want you to start right now," said Mr Hicks, "if you're game to do the boss a kindness at the risk of his turning ugly."

"Of course I'll do anything that wants doing," said Mansfield, yawning furiously.

"Well, the boss's strength has just about petered out. This hard travelling, and holding pow-wows with those old sinners all the time, has been too much for him, considering he was dead set on getting to his journey's end right away. I looked in on him an hour back, at a word from Dietrich, and found that he hadn't slept a wink all night, and was in something very like a fever. I took the liberty of giving

him a sleeping-mixture that will keep him quiet till the evening, you bet. But if he starts riding up Mount Lebanon to-morrow, and finds maybe that Queen Ernestine won't see him at the end, it will about settle his business. Now, what I want you to do is——"

"To go and see the Queen," said Mansfield, sitting up in bed.

"If she will permit you; but I want you to go and prospect around at Brutli, any way. If you are able to see her, start right in and work on her feelings till she can't see for crying. I incline to think she will come down to him at once, but allowing for wounded feelings and insulted dignity, we'll conclude that she only sends a message to invite him up there. But even if you can't see her, you can find out when she walks out and where, so that we may bring him face to face with her suddenly. Don't give the boss away, of course. To every one but the Queen you're a tourist wishing to inspect the Institution, and my darkey, who knows the country, shall go with you for a guide."

"All right. I'm your man." The words followed Mr Hicks as he left the room, and another hour saw Mansfield set forth on his embassy. The Citadel, the Seraglio, and the bridge over the Barada left behind, the route lay for a while along a broad, poplar-bordered road, on either side of which were white houses set in green gardens. This pleasant shade came to an end at the foot of the hills, and the rest of the journey presented itself as a hot and weary climb up steep mountain-paths, the monotony of which was only occasionally relieved by a grove of myrtles, or a happy valley with its terraced sides covered with vineyards and mulberry-trees. The interest which he took in his mission armed Mansfield against fatigue, and he clattered at a dangerous pace down slippery paths, and dismounted to lead his horse up steep ascents, with a dogged persistence which did not commend itself to Mr Hicks's elderly servant,

who was irreverently known as Uncle Sam. Two or three brief halts, undertaken purely for the sake of the horses, failed to mollify Uncle Sam, and when the travellers rode into the village of Brutli, only to behold the Deaconesses' Institution towering above them at the head of a further long ascent, his feelings overcame him. Approaching Mansfield, he hinted darkly that the consequences would probably be serious for both of them if they did not pause and lunch, in view of the early hour at which they had started. Mansfield acquiesced reluctantly, and they asked their way to the inn, which proved to be a more imposing building than those in the other villages they had passed. The reason for this superiority was revealed when the landlord explained with much pride that two gentlemen and several servants belonging to the household of the Queen of Thracia had occupied his best rooms for more than two years past, and that this gratifying fact had obliged him to increase his accommodation for visitors. He pointed, as he spoke, to a pleasant vine-shaded verandah on the opposite side of the courtyard, in which a table was set out in European fashion. A tall thin man had just taken his seat, and a second European, stout and elderly, was standing at the edge of the verandah, peering across the yard into the darkness of the archway in which Mansfield stood. The landlord, with a hurried apology, hastened towards him, to return in a moment beaming with smiles, and bearing a request from the Thracian gentlemen that the English traveller would share their meal. Delighted to find his path made so smooth, Mansfield crossed the courtyard, to be met by the short man at the foot of the verandah-steps, and received with flattering assurances of welcome.

"I am ashamed to intrude upon you in this way," began the guest.

"Intrude, monsieur ! The sight of you is a perfect feast for our eyes," was the reply, in very rapid French. "We

rejoice to greet one of your nation. Once we regarded all Englishmen as our friends, now there is an exception"—the thin man at the table growled indistinctly—"but there is no need to proscribe a whole people for the fault of one man. Let me present to you General Banics, formerly governor to his Majesty the King of Thracia, now master of the household to her Majesty Queen Ernestine. General, pray do me a similar kindness."

"Monsieur," growled the General, "permit me to present to you M. Peter Stefanovics, grand chamberlain to her Majesty. The coffee is growing cold, Stefanovics."

"All in good time," cried M. Stefanovics, ushering Mansfield into his place, and bowing himself to the head of the table. "Who can think of coffee when one sees a new face? We are quite free and easy at this meal, M. Mansfield, and wait upon ourselves. Madame Stefanovics does not appear so early in the day." Mansfield struggled with a look of astonishment, for the meal which the two Thracians considered as breakfast he had regarded as a midday lunch. M. Stefanovics caught his glance.

"Ah, you wonder at our hours, monsieur! But picture to yourself our life—what is one to do here? We rise, we eat, we proceed to the Institution to pay our respects to her Majesty, and inquire her orders. It is very rarely that she honours us with any. We take, perhaps, a walk or a ride for health's sake. We return here, the General sets to work at the military history he is writing, and I—I go to sleep! Madame Stefanovics spends the afternoon and evening in attendance upon her Majesty. We dine, we end the day with a game of cards or dominoes. What would you have? Sometimes her Majesty is good enough to make an errand for one of us into Damascus, sometimes one has a week's leave of absence. Then what dissipation, monsieur! One is accustomed to Bellaviste, to Vindobona—can you conceive that one feels a visit to Damascus to be a riotous affair?"

"But why does the Queen condemn you to such a life?" asked Mansfield indignantly. "What right has she to keep you——"

"Monsieur!" cried General Banics, bristling up like a tiger. M. Stefanovics laid a soothing hand upon his arm.

"Calm yourself, General. Our friend does not understand. You may not be aware, monsieur, that General Banics refused the post offered him in the King's household in order to attend her Majesty here. The unhappy events——"

"Stefanovics, you talk too fast," growled the General.

"My good General, how am I to explain things if you will interrupt me? Circumstances, monsieur, impelled the General, as a man of honour, to quit his Majesty's service and enter that of the Queen. I was already in her Majesty's household, and my wife and I followed her here as a matter of course. She did not ask us to remain. In fact, she entreated us with tears to return to Thracia and make our peace with her son, while she retained only her ladies about her person. Would you expect us to do that, monsieur? to forsake our august mistress when she was abandoned by all her friends, treated with the most revolting cruelty by those who ought to have——" an inarticulate remonstrance from the General. "In a word, monsieur, we are here, and here we stay."

"You could do nothing else," said Mansfield warmly. Then, remembering the object of his journey, he added, with lamentable duplicity, "I was anxious to see the Institution; but if her Majesty is there, I suppose visitors are not admitted. Or perhaps there are stated hours?"

"It is always possible to see the Institution, monsieur. Her Majesty would never consent to interfere with the work of the good sisters, who are a blessing to the whole countryside. But her own apartments, and a small enclosed garden upon which they look, are sacred to her. She receives no

one, and she has not quitted the Institution since first she entered it."

"Never left the one spot!" cried Mansfield, aghast. "Surely she must—I mean, has she taken any vows?"

"The Lutherans are not like the Orthodox or the Latins, monsieur, and their deaconesses are not bound by irrevocable vows. It is her Majesty's pleasure not to receive, and it is not for us to question it. The emissaries of the King and the Princess of Dardania made themselves so obnoxious on her first arrival that, outraged by their presumption and persistence, she came to this resolution. And is there any one who has a right to decide for her Majesty in the matter?"

"Certainly not," said Mansfield politely, for the tone of the question was fierce.

"There is a certain person," pursued M. Stefanovics, "attached to the household of the Princess of Dardania—a Colonel Czartoriski, I believe—who has been hanging about this neighbourhood for weeks, riding up from Damascus day after day, in the hope of being received by her Majesty and delivering into her hands a letter from his mistress. Of course he has not been successful. Is it likely that her Majesty would receive him, when we, her two faithful servants, have never been permitted to see her face the whole time she has been here?"

"You have never once seen her?" cried Mansfield.

"Stefanovics, you talk too much," said General Banics again.

"And why should we be granted such an honour?" asked M. Stefanovics, trying to cover his confusion. "If her Majesty, deceived and forsaken by the man she trusted—no, General, I mention no names—and by her own son, chooses to confine herself to the society of her ladies, who will venture to blame her? The decision lies entirely with her."

"Her Majesty's retirement is very sad, but no doubt it is natural," agreed Mansfield, whose heart had sunk lower and lower as he discerned each fresh obstacle in the way of his mission. In his own mind he was convinced that the Queen was mad, but in the hope that sheer audacity might succeed where the courtly training of the two Thracians held them back, he determined to make an effort to penetrate into her presence, that he might at least know the worst. He answered with much patience the questions which M. Stefanovics, who had relieved his mind by his outburst of confidence, showered upon him, and took his leave when the meal was over without disclosing on whose behalf he had come. He observed that neither M. Stefanovics nor the General asked any questions about the great Palestine scheme, and that they both ignored the tentative references he made to it; and it seemed to him that to proclaim himself Cyril's emissary would be to destroy the small hope of success he still possessed. Leaving Uncle Sam and the horses at the inn, he climbed the path to the Institution on foot, and asked the lame Syrian who acted as porter whether it was possible for him to see the place. The man bade him enter.

"The lady there is the senior sister," he said, indicating a stately woman in the blue dress and white cap of the Königshof deaconesses, who was passing along the piazza. "She will direct you."

Stepping forward and bowing to the deaconess, Mansfield repeated his question in German, and found himself cordially welcomed. The interest which he displayed as Sister Chriemhild conducted him in due course through the hospital, the schools, the asylum, and the chapel, was in no way feigned, for he intended to write Lady Caerleon an account of his visit, and perhaps Philippa would read it. Nevertheless, his attention wandered slightly as the tour of inspection drew to a close, for he had not succeeded in making any allusion to the Queen, and it seemed impossible to introduce her name

naturally and without undue emphasis. At last he relinquished all attempt at concealment, and turned suddenly to Sister Chriemhild, who was explaining the methods of instruction, peculiar to Königshof, which were in use among the deaconesses.

"Sister, is it possible for me to see Queen Ernestine?"

"Quite impossible," replied the deaconess, not showing the slightest surprise at the abrupt question.

"I come from—at least, I have a message for her."

She looked him straight in the face. "There is only one name that would justify me in asking one of her Majesty's ladies to see you and take charge of your message."

"I come from Count Mortimer."

The glow of delight that irradiated Sister Chriemhild's face astonished Mansfield, for in view of her grey hair and faded blue eyes he had not expected to find the deaconess's heart still young and sympathetic. She took him into a small parlour, and hurried away. Presently a stout middle-aged lady in black burst into the room; no other word will express the excitement which characterised her entrance. Bitter disappointment overspread her face at the sight of Mansfield, and she returned his bow with a frigid curtsy.

"Have I the honour of speaking to her Majesty's lady-in-waiting?" began Mansfield, perplexed by the change in her manner.

"I am Sophie von Staubach, her Majesty's lectrice. I am on duty to-day. You must have heard my name from Count Mortimer. Excuse my hurry. I could not wait to hear what Sister Chriemhild said. I took it into my head that the Count was here himself. He always looks so young, you know," returned the lady, all in a breath. Her resentment seemed to have evaporated.

"I am here on Count Mortimer's behalf," said Mansfield. "He is at Damascus, making arrangements with the Roumi authorities for the benefit of the Jews, and——"

Fräulein von Staubach uttered a little scream. "Sit down," she said, pointing to a chair, "and let us talk comfortably. Then Count Mortimer is the Prince of the Jews, after all? Now tell me——"

She poured forth her questions. Where was Cyril staying, what was the exact nature of his present occupation, how long had Mansfield known him, what had he been doing since he left Thracia, did he look any older, did he often mention the Queen, what was his object in seeking her out?—and so on, without a pause. Mansfield answered her inquiries as fully as she would let him, describing Cyril's condition with all the pathos he could command, and felt that success was in his grasp when Fräulein von Staubach, who had been making occasional dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief, suddenly broke down and wept noisily.

"Of course he treated the dear Queen abominably, but I have always longed that he should come back and make it up with her," she sobbed.

"Then will you tell me how I can see her Majesty, Fräulein?" Mansfield felt it advisable not to protest against the lady's opinion of Cyril's behaviour, but his self-suppression failed of its effect. Fräulein von Staubach started violently, sat up and wiped her eyes, and looked at him severely.

"It is quite evident that you are not accustomed to courts, sir," she said. "Her Majesty has not commanded you to wait upon her, I believe?"

"How could she, when she didn't know of my existence?" asked Mansfield, with not unreasonable impatience. "But if you will be kind enough to tell her why I am here, no doubt she will allow me to wait upon her."

"It is impossible—quite impossible," said the lady, nervously.

"Because her Majesty only receives ladies? But I am merely a messenger—Count Mortimer's messenger."

"I know; but it is out of the question—I dare not—I mean, I cannot," stammered Fräulein von Staubach, with more distress than the occasion seemed to warrant.

"Well, then, at least you will help to bring them together. Count Mortimer will ride up here to-morrow, and you will manage to admit him into the Queen's private garden?"

"You won't understand!" she cried. "Her Majesty's decision is irrevocable. Nothing I could do would induce her to alter it. If Count Mortimer were here at this moment, and if he presented himself day after day, entreating her Majesty to receive him, it would have no effect."

"But surely, Fräulein, her Majesty must be very much changed if this is the case? And yet, from all you have been saying, I should almost have thought she would be glad to see Count Mortimer."

Fräulein von Staubach flushed angrily. "I cannot answer for her Majesty," she said, with dignity, "and you have no right to put an interpretation of your own on my unguarded remarks, sir. The utmost I can do for Count Mortimer is to watch for an opportunity of bringing his name to the Queen's recollection; and I shall certainly not have the chance for a fortnight, perhaps a month. It is useless for the Count to come here at present."

Mansfield gazed at her aghast. This could only mean that the Queen was mad, but enjoyed occasional lucid intervals. "Fräulein," he said reluctantly, "I entreat you to pardon me, but I must ask you a very important question. Is it unhappily the case that her Majesty is—that her troubles have—that her mind is affected?"

Fräulein von Staubach rose and glared at him before she could find words to reply. "Oh, that is what your master wants to know, is it?" she cried. "Go back and tell him that if she is mad he has made her so. He wishes to free himself from her and marry the Princess of Dardania, does he? Oh, yes; Princess Anna Mirkovics heard of his recent

proceedings from Colonel Czartoriski when she was on duty here. Mad, indeed! her Majesty mad! Out of the way, sir; let me pass. You have insulted my august mistress."

"Pardon me, Fräulein," said Mansfield, amazed by this sudden burst of passion. It was so timely that it might almost seem to have occurred in order to afford the lady an excuse for terminating the interview, but he was between her and the door. "If you refuse to answer me, I must sorrowfully conclude that my conjecture was well founded. Is that the message I am to take back to Count Mortimer?"

"Do you call yourself sane?" demanded Fräulein von Staubach viciously; "because her Majesty is far saner than you are. You thought she was mad, did you? No; you may tell Count Mortimer that if his object was to drive her mad, he failed. Let me pass, sir!"

She swept out of the room in a whirlwind of righteous indignation. As for Mansfield, he took a sorrowful leave of Sister Chriemhild, walked down regretfully to the spot at which he had told Uncle Sam to meet him with the horses, and rode back to Damascus with a gloomy countenance. He had felt so sure of success, so confident of bringing back with him some message, though perhaps only a word or two, from the Queen to Cyril, and he had accomplished nothing. It was possible, even, that he had done harm, and he began to wonder what Cyril would think of the way in which Mr Hicks and he had meddled in his affairs.

CHAPTER XV.

A FOOL'S ERRAND.

"REALLY," said Cyril, "words fail me to express my gratitude. The conspicuous success which has crowned your kind efforts would alone be sufficient——"

"Say, Count," broke in Mr Hicks, "don't make us squirm ourselves right away through the floor. Mr Mansfield is not to blame, any way, for I despatched him and told him to go ahead, and I acted as I thought best for you in my professional capacity, sir."

"Professional capacity be hanged!" said Cyril, sharply. "What does your professional capacity make of the result of this precious expedition? Nice little encouragement for the patient, eh? Hearten him up a bit, I suppose? You and Mansfield are both too clever for me, Hicks. To the ordinary mind it would have occurred that in the peculiar circumstances of the case my only hope was to go there myself and take the Queen by surprise, but you have knocked all chance of that on the head."

"But, Count," ventured Mansfield, "the lady said it would be quite useless for you to go, because you would not be admitted."

"Did you ever know me baffled yet in a thing I meant to do, Mansfield? Fräulein von Staubach and I are old friends."

"Well, Count, she has promised to mention your name to the Queen at the earliest opportunity. I will ride up to Brutli again to-morrow, and try and arrange with her to let you know the moment she has done it. But she said it would certainly not be for a fortnight."

"A fortnight?" Cyril's irritation subsided suddenly, as a new idea appeared to strike him. "Mansfield, I want to know exactly what she told you."

Mansfield cudgelled his brains, and, aided by a stringent cross-examination, succeeded in recalling very faithfully the conversation which had taken place between Fräulein von Staubach and himself. When he had come to the end, Cyril smiled gently.

"Since you two have gone to work so ingeniously to spoil my plans with regard to the Queen," he said, "I shall put business before pleasure once more, and devote this fortnight to looking up the Great Princess of the Beni Ismail."

"Great Jehoshaphat!" cried Mr Hicks, in consternation. "You talk of setting off on a desert journey right now, Count, when you're down sick? A little ride in the cars to Beyrout, now, would bring you round a bit, I guess, but a wild goose chase into the mouth of hell after a female that no one has ever seen—no, sir! You may bet your bottom dollar——"

"That I go? Quite so. You needn't come, you know, Hicks. If Mansfield is willing to relinquish the right of private judgment, I'll take him, to punish him for the mischief he has done, but there must be no more interference with my plans for any reason whatever."

"You bet!" said Mr Hicks, energetically. "But you'll have to conclude to take me as part of the outfit, Count. Your physician extraordinary won't quit until he's kicked out. And since you're set on this piece of foolishness, I suppose I may as well hand you a document which was left for you to-day, but when Mr Mansfield came back and we began upon this palaver, I forgot it."

Cyril took the letter, which was written on rough native paper, and read it through carefully. "How did you get hold of this, Hicks?" he asked at last.

"Brought by a blind Arab with a book under his arm, Count. 'From the Great Princess,' he said, as he handed it to me. He mentioned that he was a Protestant, and seemed to incline to loaf around and ask affectionately after the Churches of America, but I was in a hurry, and fired him out."

"My dear Hicks! Why not have humoured the poor wretch, and kept him in talk? He would have been able to give me just the information I want."

"That is so, Count, and that's why I invited him to vanish."

"Won't do, Hicks. You'll have to find him again now."

"I guess so," said Mr Hicks resignedly. "Well, I reckon I'll appeal to our racketsy friend Mahmud Fadil. He makes out to be acquainted with all the shady characters in the city. But I hope the lady is kindly disposed towards you, Count?"

"Not exactly. She warns me not to meddle with her subjects or their territory, on pain of an appeal to the Powers. Strange that she should have picked up that idea, isn't it? But her scribe writes French, so very likely he is an Armenian from Czarigrad, full of the latest European notions. Her seal is Arabic, you see, but it has only 'I, the Queen of the Desert,' on it, no name."

In fulfilment of the task imposed upon him by Cyril, Mr Hicks set out the next morning to seek the help of Mahmud Fadil, who had no difficulty in identifying from his description the person of whom he was in search.

"I know him," he said. "It is Yeshua, a dog of a Bedawi who professes to have become a Christian, and is in the pay of the English ladies who have the schools."

"Could you manage to lay your hand on him?" asked Mr Hicks.

"You want him seized—put out of the way? Oh yes, it can be done, of course, but it will be rather expensive, on account of the English ladies. These wretched missionaries fly to their consuls on the slightest pretext."

"I guess I don't just want him wiped out," said Mr Hicks meditatively. "A little quiet talk with him is all I ask. And if your soldiers could be brought to understand, sir, that a small extra present would pass between us if they carried the business through without fuss and without hurting the gentleman's feelings, it might obviate any difficulty with the consul."

Mahmud Fadil acquiesced in the proposal with some disappointment. He had anticipated the handling of a considerable sum of money, a certain proportion of which would naturally stick to his own fingers in the process, but he gave the necessary orders, keenly conscious that half a loaf is better than no bread. Accordingly, Cyril's quarters were invaded, shortly after darkness had fallen, by several file of soldiers, dragging with them the blind man, who offered no resistance beyond protesting against the illegality of his arrest. Mr Hicks was on the look-out, and after reassuring the owners of the house, and dismissing the soldiers with the reward agreed upon, led the prisoner into Cyril's room.

"Fear not, O father of a book," he said in Arabic; "no harm shall befall thee. Tell the Prince of the Jews who thou art."

"My lord's servant is Yeshua the son of Ishak," answered the blind man, turning his sightless eyes in the direction of the divan on which Cyril was lying, "and he goes hither and thither among the tents of his brethren to tell them the words of Life."

"Was it you who brought me the letter from the Princess of the Beni Ismail?" asked Cyril. Mr Hicks translated the question.

"My lord's servant was sojourning a week ago in the tents

of the Beni Ismail, and their sheikh asked him to carry a message to the Prince of the Jews. The tribe fear to enter the town, lest the Roumis should seize and imprison them."

"Then you did not see the Princess—I mean, she did not give you the letter?"

"Nay, my lord, how should such a one as Yeshua ibn Ishak be admitted to the presence of the Great Princess? One of her women had given the paper to the sheikh."

"I see. Did you find your way here from Sitt Zeynab alone?"

"Certain of the tribe brought my lord's servant on his way for a part of the distance. After that he knew the road."

"Good. Will you guide me to the spot where they left you?"

"God forbid! Would my lord have his servant betray his brethren?"

"But I don't want to do your brethren any harm," said Cyril impatiently. "I am not a Roumi. I am only anxious to make a treaty with them."

"Nay, my lord, thy servant cannot reveal their secret. They have trusted him, and if he failed them they would blaspheme the religion of the Lord Jesus."

"I can hand you over to the Roumis, and have you thrown into prison, if you refuse to answer me. Do you know this?"

"My lord must do as he will with his servant," said the blind man.

"Oh, Count, he's too plucky to be threatened," said Mansfield indignantly. "Why not see if he will take a message back to his sheikh?"

"I have no intention of eating him," returned Cyril. "Well, Yeshua ibn Ishak, will you find out your sheikh and tell him that I wish for a friendly meeting with the

Princess? These two *khawajas* shall come with me, and we will bring one servant each, but no soldiers. I desire peace with the Beni Ismail, not war, and if he will bring me to Sitt Zeynab it will be for the good of all his tribe for ever."

"But the Great Princess will never consent to talk with my lord."

"Perhaps not; but she could send her scribe, or she might even talk with me through a curtain. Will you take the message?"

"My lord's servant will carry the word, but there is no likelihood that the sheikh will consent. The stranger must not come into the land of the Beni Ismail."

"Time will show. Good evening, then. Mansfield, see that the man has something to eat, and give him a few piastres if you think it will make him feel more kindly towards us. How long do you say it will take to get an answer to the message, Hicks?"

"Well, Count, I guess the sheikh has some of his men cached not so very far from the city, in case our blind friend has any news to despatch. Would you incline to have him shadowed?"

"No; he would find it out, and the discovery would destroy his rather shaky confidence in us. Suppose you jot down a few of the things we shall need for the journey. I expect to start the day after to-morrow."

"Well, sir, there's nothing like assurance, any way," said Mr Hicks, sitting down at Mansfield's table and appropriating his writing materials. "Do you calculate to take tents with you?"

"He's a good fellow, Count," said Mansfield, returning. "He would not take any money, because he said the Mission provided for his needs. I looked at his Bible in raised type, and he told me how astonished the Arabs were to see a blind man read. He seems to have some thrilling experi-

ences to describe, if only I could understand his English; but it is rather sketchy."

"You had better write an account of your interesting friend to Lady Caerleon. I know that Syria is one of her many favourite mission-fields. But while you are striking up an acquaintance with this picturesque character, here is Mr Hicks doing your work. Tents, did you say, Hicks? One small tent for the three of us. This expedition is not going to be a picnic."

"You bet!" murmured Mr Hicks disconsolately, as he resigned his place to Mansfield, who wondered even more than he did at the calm confidence with which Cyril continued to make arrangements for a journey which neither of his companions believed would ever be undertaken. But his foresight was truer than theirs. When Mansfield returned the next day from visiting the bazaars, the citadel and the walls, the ruins of the Great Mosque, and other lions of Damascus, under the guidance of a Jewish youth, he found the blind Bedawi sitting outside the house and waiting for him. After puzzling out the meaning of Yeshua's broken English, he entered Cyril's room somewhat doubtfully.

"The blind man has come back, Count. He says that the sheikh consents to escort you to Sitt Zeynab, but you must bring no servants with you, only Mr Hicks and myself."

"Very well; but in that case the sheikh must only have two of his own men with him. It's not so much as a precaution, for of course the whole tribe might be hiding behind the first sandhill, but just to show him that he can't ride roughshod over me."

"But Yeshua begged me to warn you not to go, Count. He says the Beni Ismail have never allowed a stranger to reach Sitt Zeynab yet, and he is afraid they mean to hold you as a hostage."

"He doesn't seem to realise that it is what I mean, and

not what they mean, that will come to pass. Let Yeshua arrange with the sheikh where he is to meet us, Mansfield, and if it is out in the desert, tell him to be waiting for us himself by the cemetery wall as soon as the gates are opened to-morrow morning, that he may guide us to the right spot. We will bring nothing but what we can carry on our own horses. The tent must be given up."

"I guess you're real set on this mad business, Count," said Mr Hicks, as Mansfield left the room.

"That's just what I have been trying to impress upon you for two whole days, Hicks."

But in spite of this solemn assurance, and the hasty preparations which occupied the rest of the day, neither Mr Hicks nor Mansfield really believed in the expedition until they found themselves riding through the eastern gate of Damascus in the dawn of the following morning. To all appearance they were bound only on a short excursion. The sheikh had agreed to furnish water and desert fare for the travellers, and each man carried a bag of corn for his horse, together with an iron peg and a rope for tethering purposes. A pair of capacious saddle-bags, containing the smallest possible allowance of additional raiment and toilet necessities, and a large *abba* or cloak of coarse cotton, rolled up tightly in front of the saddle, completed the equipment of each. To Mahmud Fadil alone among those in authority had the secret of their journey been confided, and his silence was secured in the only effectual way, by means of a present and a promise. The melancholy Paschies had been furnished with instructions in view of all the possible complications of political affairs that suggested themselves to Cyril's mind, and placed in charge of two telegrams, one for the Chevalier Goldberg and one for Lord Caerleon, which were not to be despatched until the adventurers had fairly started. Mr Hicks had been permitted to send a communication to his paper, in which he dealt with the expedition in terms of such

enticing obscurity and tantalising reticence as to suggest that the whole solution of the Palestine question hung on his being lost to sight in the Syrian desert for a fortnight or more. Mansfield's personal preparations were not extensive, for he did little beyond writing a letter to Lord Caerleon, which was only to be posted in case he did not return from the journey.

Outside the gate was the camping-ground of the caravans from Baghdad, with its hundreds of knee-haltered camels, and its bronzed Arabs bargaining and quarrelling in a hopeless *patois* over the goods piled up round their rough tents. Then came the dismal ride through the native burying-ground, filled with the ruinous and half-open vaults of the Christians on the one hand and the fallen tombstones of the Jews on the other, and when this had been passed, the form of Yeshua could be distinguished, waiting faithfully under the walnut-trees overhanging the wall of the Protestant cemetery. After the usual salutations had been exchanged, Cyril rode ahead with the blind man, and Mr Hicks and Mansfield found themselves side by side.

"What is it you're afraid of?" asked Mansfield all at once, observing that his companion looked back apprehensively from time to time.

"Well, I must say I'm glad to have got the boss out of the city without a fight, Mr Mansfield. There is an elderly military character who's been real pressing in his inquiries after him each day since we came, and I guess his intentions are not healthy. I interviewed him on behalf of the boss, but when I found that my friend did the general utility business for the Princess of Dardania, and had something big on hand, you bet his messages reached me and stopped there. The language he made use of yesterday when I told him the Count was sick yet was remarkably free, and he didn't see fit to cool down until I just had him into the yard and showed him a little fancy shooting. Guess he

won't try the fire-eating tip again with me, after seeing me print my initials on the wall in bullets, but I don't mind telling you I've been real scared lest he should be fooling round somewhere on the street this morning and meet the boss."

"But you don't think the Count would fight him?"

"You bet your life he would, and paint the town red with his vital fluid, too, if he was in his proper form. But he's sick and strung-up both, and I don't care for the risk."

"Isn't it wonderful how well he sits his horse?" asked Mansfield, looking at Cyril as he rode in front.

"That's what I tell you, he's strung-up for this job. He has something big in his eye that I don't see. I must figure it out."

Mr Hicks relapsed into silence, pondering busily the problem he had set himself, and Mansfield did not disturb his meditations as they rode through the fruit-gardens and walnut-groves surrounding the city, and then across the bare fields, populous just now with camels belonging to friendly Arabs. The tribesmen were encamped in the neighbourhood of the town for the double purpose of obtaining their annual store of corn from the farmers, and allowing their camels the luxury of grazing upon the stubble, which the peasants did not resent, since it helped to clear the fields for the ploughing which would take place when the winter rains were over. A little farther, and the signs of cultivation became more rare, one or two villages were passed, each with its belt of fertile soil, and then the desert itself came into view—not a wide flat expanse of sand, but a region of stony hills and rugged valleys, with here and there a patch of coarse grass or starved-looking bushes. The blind man, feeling the way with the staff he carried, seemed never at a loss to discover the track, which was hardly distinguishable even to the eye, and at length, on

rounding the shoulder of a hillock in no way more remarkable than the rest, he turned to Cyril and remarked—

“This is the place where the sheikh will meet my lord.”

“Then he is late,” said Cyril, looking round.

“Nay, my lord, the Beni Ismail will not show themselves until they are satisfied that the *khawajas* are their friends.” He raised his voice in a shrill cry, and presently a head appeared, peeping suspiciously round a rock at some distance. Informed of this, Yeshua repeated his call, and presently three Arabs made their appearance from different directions, each man leading his horse. The blind man went forward to meet them, and an animated colloquy ensued, out of earshot of the travellers.

“I don’t quite like the look of this,” said Cyril. “Is our blind friend stipulating for his share of the spoils?”

“Oh no, Count,” said Mansfield; “he’s trying to get them to swear not to hurt us. He told me he would. The poor beggar has cottoned to me rather,” he added shamefacedly. “Yesterday I went to see the mission with which he is connected, and the ladies told him, and he was awfully pleased.”

“Well, don’t be ashamed of your good deeds,” said Cyril. “We shall both be grateful for them when they have saved all our lives.”

Presently, with a beaming face, the blind man brought the sheikh forward, and having introduced him to Cyril, took his leave, whispering to Mansfield as he passed.

“They will not hurt you, *Khawaja*. They have sworn it on the Holy Book.”

He turned back in the direction of Damascus, and before disappearing among the sandhills, paused to hold up his book as a reminder to the Arabs. The sheikh, who had been scanning Cyril’s face with an interest which he tried in vain to dissemble, asked him through Mr Hicks whether he would prefer to rest for a while or to proceed at once, and on his

choosing to push on, made a sign to his men, who mounted their horses, one of them riding ahead as a scout.

In this way the three adventurers began a strange journey, the novelty of which did not prevent it from palling upon them very quickly. Sometimes the desert was hilly and rugged, sometimes it was flat and sandy, but it was always arid, sunny, and treeless. The society of the sheikh and his followers was as monotonous as their native scenery. They made it evident that they preferred to keep entirely to themselves, riding together in advance, and never, if they could help it, exchanging a word with their unwelcome guests. When a halt for food or rest became necessary, they showed the same anxiety not to associate with them, seating themselves on the opposite side of the fire, if there was one, and when there was none, taking shelter behind their horses. At first Cyril made many determined efforts to induce them to talk, with the help of Mr Hicks as interpreter, but in vain. None of them would give him any information as to the extent of the territory claimed by the tribe, their ruler or her capital, the probable length of the journey, or the direction in which they were going. His failure did not seem to dishearten him, however, although he ceased his attempts to draw them into conversation, and he sustained the hardships of the march in a way that was little short of astonishing. The distance from one well to another, which must be covered in a single stage, was often so great that the travellers fell asleep from sheer fatigue as they rode, and on reaching the halting-place could do nothing but tether their horses and throw themselves on the ground for a few minutes of precious slumber, even before thinking of the much-needed evening meal. The food, which consisted almost exclusively of dry flaps of native bread and a sticky preparation of pounded dates, was just sufficient to support life; the water, on the other hand, seemed generally calculated to destroy it. The small supply of tea which they had

contrived to bring with them was soon exhausted, and Cyril and Mr Hicks qualified the nauseous draught with brandy; but Mansfield, who was a teetotaller, as became Lady Philippa's lover, drank it heroically unmixed. Shelter at night there was none. The force of habit made the three foreigners creep as far as possible under the bushes, when there were any, to the derision of their guides, and they were also sufficiently fastidious to remove all the most obtrusive pebbles from the spot selected for a bed; but the large light cloaks that protected them from the dust by day served also as a covering at night, and each man's pillow was such as his own ingenuity could devise from his small stock of possessions.

"It isn't the grub I mind," lamented Mansfield one day to Mr Hicks, when the journey had lasted nearly a week, "nor even having to do without a bed, but I do detest getting so horribly grimy. I don't believe I shall ever be clean again."

"We're all in the same boat," responded Mr Hicks. "I guess some of the haughty aristocrats that have entertained the boss in their marble halls would think twice before speaking to him now."

"He doesn't seem to mind," said Mansfield dolefully. "He said this morning that the ease with which one learned to do without the refinements of civilisation was a clear proof of the innate savagery of human nature. Before I came I thought I would bring plenty of soap, whatever else I had to leave behind, but there's no chance of using it. And as for shaving——"

"Well, think how you'll wallow in the luxuries of an effete civilisation when you get back to it!" was the sympathetic reply; but Mansfield was wondering what Philippa would think of him if he returned to England with a beard, and did not answer. "Guess we'll all be as fit as the Arabs if this goes on much longer," continued Mr Hicks cheerfully.

"You and I are as hard as nails already. The boss can't get much thinner, any way, but just look at him! He's spunkier every day."

"Do you know," said Mansfield, in a sudden burst of confidence, "it almost makes me feel queer to see him riding on day after day with that iron face, and not caring a hang for anything. He has been so ill, you know, and that affair at Jericho—— Sometimes I wonder what will happen to him if this business smashes up. He might—might—go mad."

"Is that so? That notion has struck you too!" Mr Hicks glanced round at Mansfield as the latter lowered his voice. "But don't you go expecting a bust-up. The boss is not taking any. He's the man to go fooling round in this desert until the Day of Judgment—sort of a dry land edition of the Flying Dutchman, so to speak—rather than turn tail and confess that he's beaten. I've figured out that little mystery by this time. The boss has planked his whole pile on the table for this game, and he stands to win everything or go under. *Sabe?* Say you run across a soldier of fortune. You receive him as a man and a brother, until you get to know that he has not been above hiring his sword out to a crowd of pirates. Then you dry up. That's how it is with the boss. If he comes to smash now he's done, on account of having sided with the Jews against his own colour. His world can never forgive that. But if he succeeds—why, then it's as certain as things can be in this uncertain universe that he'll become a real brand-new, properly organised, guaranteed by Europe, constitutional prince, with a part to play that will take all his time and be a thing of joy to him for ever. Do you guess he'll let himself be fooled out of that by any dusky scarecrow of a nigger chieftainness that chooses to work the political racket and talk big about the Powers? No, sir!"

The march continued, with no diminution of its unpleasantness, and the travellers began to wonder when it would come

to an end. Ordinarily, so they had understood from Yeshua, it was accomplished in a week; but to all appearance they were no nearer Sitt Zeynab now than they had been at the beginning of their journey.

"Guess I wish the desert wasn't so like itself," grumbled Mr Hicks to Mansfield on the eighth day after leaving Damascus. "The hog that Mark Twain came upon seven times over on the Riffelberg wasn't a circumstance to it. I could have sworn we had passed those sandhills before."

"I've been thinking so all day," said Mansfield; "but I had an idea that the heat and the monotony might be affecting my brain. Let's ask the Count what he thinks. I see he is suggesting a halt to the sheikh."

They followed Cyril, who had been riding ahead of them as usual, but had now dismounted, and was walking his horse towards a clump of bushes. Here he stopped, and appeared to brush away the sand and pick up something. As they came up, he turned to them, and held out a small metal match-box for their inspection.

"I buried it at the foot of that bush on the third morning after we started," he said. "I suspected some trick of this sort,"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOUSE OF THE LADY ZENOBIA.

THE three men looked at each other and at the match-box. Mansfield broke the silence first.

"Then all this beastly journey has been for nothing?" he cried, with youthful outspokenness. "We are no nearer Sitt Zeynab than we were at first!"

"Look out, Count!" said Mr Hicks quickly. "Put that thing away, or the Arabs will twig that it was not here for its health."

"That's just what I want. It's no good mincing matters now. Put your heads together and take a good squint at the thing, and then look as angry and excited as you like, but say nothing to those fellows. After supper we will have an ostentatiously serious talk."

Quite in the dark as to Cyril's intentions, the others nevertheless obeyed him, casting glances of suspicion and dislike, which it needed no dissimulation to render realistic, at the Arabs in the intervals of picketing and rubbing down the horses and gathering sticks for the fire. This change of demeanour did not pass unnoticed, and after their frugal meal the hostile camps met separately in serious consultation. Mr Hicks and Mansfield failed to receive the enlightenment they expected and desired. Cyril let them say what they liked, but offered no suggestions of his own, listening

to all that was said with an air of languor, almost of boredom.

"Tell the sheikh that I wish to speak to him in the morning before we start, Hicks," he said at last, and Mr Hicks obeyed, wondering.

"That the boss should give them free leave to vamoose the ranche in the hours of darkness throws me out," he said, and Mansfield determined to balance this extraordinary failure of judgment on his leader's part by keeping watch on his own account all night. But a hard day's riding in sun and sand is not the best method of preparation for a vigil, and not so very long after his usual hour Mansfield was comfortably asleep. It was Cyril's voice which aroused his two companions from their dreamless slumbers.

"Mansfield! Hicks! wake up! Your revolvers!"

Mr Hicks was on the alert in a moment, revolver in hand. There was no moon, and the fire was almost out, but his ear told him that the words came from the neighbourhood of the horses, which were plunging and kicking.

"Strike a light," continued the voice, "and let's see who it is I've got here."

The flickering gleam of the match showed that Cyril was holding the loosened heel-rope of his own horse, while his revolver was pressed to the forehead of the sheikh. The man was crouching on the ground in an attitude which made it clear that he had been surprised when about to release the other horses. Just outside the circle of the light the dark forms of the two tribesmen were visible against the stars, mounted and ready to ride away, but afraid of endangering their sheikh if they attempted to attack Cyril. The sheikh's own horse was close at his heels.

"Is your revolver cocked, Hicks?" asked Cyril. "Mansfield, go and fetch in the sheikh's horse, but don't fire unless I give the word. Now, Hicks, ask the sheikh what he is doing here."

"He says he never calculated to take you to Sitt Zeynab, Count," said Mr Hicks, receiving the sullen answers of the captive. "He and his people have fixed up all the other travellers in this style, leading them round and round until they were tired, and then sloping with their horses. They were so glad to escape from the desert, when they found their way out at last, that they never wanted to come back. He says he saw that we suspected something last evening, and he concluded it was time to travel."

"Tell him," said Cyril, smiling grimly, "that he may lead us round and round as much as he likes, but he will have to take us to Sitt Zeynab at last, unless he wishes to wander about with us for ever."

"He says he guesses there'll be some shooting first, Count."

"I quite agree with him. Mansfield, cock your revolver, as loudly as you can. Tell him that I shall have his horse and those of his men shot if I hear much more of this."

"You have him there, Count; but he says he can get fresh horses and come back and lay you out."

"Hardly," was the suave reply. "I shall keep him and his men as guides all the same; but they will have to walk."

"Don't mind him, Count; he's just relieving his feelings a bit, I guess. It seems to hurt him real badly, the way he's walked into this trap of yours."

The sheikh was groaning vigorously, and alternately muttering and shouting imprecations in Arabic. At last he became somewhat calmer.

"What does the Prince of the Jews want?" he demanded of Mr Hicks.

"To get to Sitt Zeynab, and you may bet your boots he'll do it."

"What does he desire there?"

"According to the stars," said Cyril solemnly, "the fate

of your Princess is linked with mine. If we meet, it will be a very good thing for both of us ; if not, great disasters will follow."

"Say, Count, pile it on !" murmured Mr Hicks, in ecstasies of admiration. "Guess I'll most believe you myself soon. He says that even if you get to Sitt Zeynab, that wouldn't help you to see the Princess or make a treaty with her."

"Tell him I'll take my chance of that."

"He says the Princess is safe to imprison you and hold you to ransom."

"Let her. I am going to Sitt Zeynab."

"He concludes to give in, Count ; but he is using improper language about the day he inaugurated this personally conducted trip business."

"Quite possible and very natural. Tell him to make his men dismount, Hicks, and let one of them bring their horses over here. Then he can go back with them to their side of the fire. Point out to him the space between the horses and that rock over there. If any of them cross that before day-break we shall not hesitate to shoot. On the march he himself will ride between you and Mansfield, his men in single file in front of me."

The contest was over, to the unbounded admiration of the Arabs, who began to regard Cyril as a being little short of miraculous, since he could see and hear in his sleep. That this feeling on their part was to a certain extent a guarantee of safety to the travellers became evident the next day, when a large body of mounted Arabs swooped down upon the party as they approached the wells at which the unwilling guides suggested a mid-day halt. It was clear that the new-comers were prepared to congratulate their sheikh on his success in misleading a fresh band of Roumi spies, and it was a shock to them to perceive that the spies had not yet allowed themselves to be shaken off. The sheikh

displayed extreme tact in making the best of the situation. He explained matters to his followers in a speech which was designed to show that he was effecting a long-planned *coup* in carrying off the Prince of the Jews to Sitt Zeynab to hold him to ransom, without so much as allowing the captive to suspect that he was a prisoner. But whether the sheikh's hearers were equally accomplished liars with himself, and thus naturally prone to discount his assertions, or whether his two original followers failed to corroborate him as they should, the awe with which Cyril was regarded spread quickly to the larger circle. This was highly satisfactory, since, as Mr Hicks pointed out to Mansfield, the tribe might easily have annihilated the three intruders without a possibility of resistance, in one of the paroxysms of powder-play and spear-flourishing with which they celebrated the sheikh's return. Portents began to multiply around Cyril. At one time it was a stray stork, called by the Arabs the father of luck, which stood meditatively behind him for some time, undisturbed by the eager whispers around ; at another a scorpion, which had ensconced itself under one of his boots for the night. It left the marks of its claws on his finger when he took up the boot in the morning, but Mansfield killed it with a stone before it had time to turn round and sting him.

Four days longer the march lasted, crossing a strip of desert more sandy, stony, sunny, hot, and thirsty than any passed hitherto. This pathless, waterless tract was the true defence of Sitt Zeynab, the real reason why neither Roumi nor hostile tribesman had ever succeeded in making his way thither. The Beni Ismail knew their desert as well as if it had been traversed by a high road, but they economised their stock of water and curtailed their halts as far as possible while they were passing through it. This added discomfort pressed with special severity upon those unaccustomed to desert travelling. Mr Hicks and Mansfield, riding

on in the baking sun hour after hour, with dry mouths and parched tongues, were both heartily sick of the adventure; but neither of them breathed a word of complaint or remonstrance to Cyril. Nor—which was a far stronger testimony to their loyalty—did they even exchange murmurs with one another; their nearest approach to doing so was an occasional lament over the joys of civilisation. If a bath was Mansfield's ideal of unattainable happiness, Mr Hicks's was a sherry cobbler. His dreams, he averred, were haunted by the pleasant tinkle of the ice in the glass, and as he lifted the straw to his parched lips the thought would cross his mind that it was worth while to have a real thirst on, for the pleasure of quenching it; but at this point he invariably awoke. Cyril alone appeared unconscious of the fresh hardships of this portion of the journey. Riding by himself, he was nevertheless ready, when his companions addressed him, to exchange with them the grim pleasantries which suited the situation. It was clear, however, that his thoughts were not bounded by the present scene, and Mr Hicks hazarded the suggestion that his brain was evolving schemes of universal dominion. The Arabs viewed him with ever-increasing respect, and it was with genuine awe that the sheikh rode up to him one afternoon, and, pointing out a hill upon the horizon, the summit of which seemed more regular in form than those on either side, said—

“Behold, O Prince of the Jews, the house of Sitt Zeynab!”

The response to the announcement was as alarming as it was unexpected. Cyril fell forward unconscious upon his horse's neck.

“Guessed it would come to this,” muttered Mr Hicks. “No, sheikh,” when Mansfield and he had tried various remedies in vain, “it's no good trying to revive him out here. We must get him in somewhere cool and shady, with plenty of water.”

"But why should the Prince of the Jews become as one dead when I show him the house of Sitt Zeynab?" asked the sheikh.

"Well," said Mr Hicks meditatively, for he was busy superintending the construction of a litter from spears and cloaks, "I guess he thinks you've kept him so long upon the road that he hasn't much time to ward off those disasters he spoke of from your Princess."

Much subdued by this reply, the sheikh detailed four of his followers to carry the litter, and ordered four others to be ready to relieve them, betraying by such unexpected complaisance the ascendancy which Cyril had gained over his mind. Mansfield, in his deep anxiety, dismounted and walked beside the litter, fearing lest the bearers might stumble; but Mr Hicks laughed at him and maintained his position beside the sheikh, with the cheering assurance that this period of insensibility would ensure to Cyril the very rest his brain needed. Mansfield had no attention to give to anything unconnected with the patient, but the American's restless eyes were everywhere. He noticed the broken columns and other fragments of stonework which began to make their appearance in the sand, and which showed that a considerable town had once stood on this spot, looking for its defence to the fortified hill of Sitt Zeynab. As he approached the fortress he was able to distinguish that the massive wall enclosing the summit of the hill bore evident traces of having been repaired at various points, and probably at very varying dates, with masses of rock and pieces of sculptured marble in place of its own bevelled stone. Above the top of the wall a flat roof supported by pillars was just visible, and at one corner stood a watch-tower of considerable height. Under the shadow of the hill nestled a motley group of black tents and mud huts, keeping guard over an oasis of moderate extent, the greenness of which looked heaven-like to eyes wearied by the glare of the desert. Palm-groves and leafy thickets marked the course

of a stream, and fringed the borders of the marsh in which it terminated, and Mr Hicks perceived at once that some attempt was made to cultivate corn and melons with the help of irrigation. The water, the sheikh told him, came from hidden springs in the heart of the hill, and served to keep filled an underground reservoir, for use in the event of a siege, before it was allowed to issue forth into the plain. This information was given as the travellers began to mount the zigzag path which led to the gateway of the fortress. It was evident that their approach had been observed, for one of the heavy doors stood open, and a woman, wrapped from head to foot in a white veil, had stepped outside to await them.

"Is that the Princess?" asked Mr Hicks of the sheikh, looking up at the white figure with involuntary awe.

"Nay, it is only her scribe, but she also is a great woman, one in whom is much wisdom, and the Princess is guided by her counsels. The *khawaja* will see her eyes like the clouds when the snow is falling upon Lebanon, but I who speak to him have seen them black like the sky in a midnight without stars. That is when the Princess is in great straits."

"But what sort of difficulties does the Princess get into?" asked Mr Hicks curiously. The sheikh drew nearer, and spoke confidentially.

"There was a time, *Khawaja*, when I with certain of the tribe was escorting the Princess and her women to Sitt Zeynab. On a sudden we beheld a great host riding swiftly against us, with every sign of war. Then I cried out, loudly, and with intent to deceive the women, 'Lo! it is the Beni Ayub who have heard that we are ruled by a woman, and are coming to swallow us up.' But when I looked to see the Princess blench, she cried, as the scribe told us, 'Let us have no bloodshed! I will go and speak with them,' and beckoning to the scribe, she urged on her horse. But the scribe cried to me, 'Stop the Princess! If aught befall her, it were better for thee and thy tribe never to have been born,' and she

dashed forward by herself. Then it was that I saw her eyes black as Iblis, but it was not with fear, for she rode straight up to those who came against us, and spoke boldly to them, I holding fast to the Princess's bridle, although she cursed me and struck at me with her whip. But when the scribe reached the enemy, behold! they were not the Beni Ayub at all, but the rest of our own tribe, come to greet the Princess. And all the tribe said, 'Lo! the spirit of a man is in these women. It is no shame to be ruled by them,' and we were content."

"And the ladies—were they content when they twigged your little joke?" asked Mr Hicks.

"Nay, the scribe spoke very freely to us all. But who cares for a woman's tongue?"

"It don't seem to strike you that it was a queer dodge to play tricks of that sort on your Princess, sheikh. Was it just at the beginning of her reign?"

The sheikh looked straight at Mr Hicks with blank, expressionless eyes. His burst of confidence was clearly at an end. "This is the door of the house of Sitt Zeynab, and here is the scribe of the Great Princess," he said. "Peace be upon thee, O lady!"

"And upon thee be peace!" replied the veiled woman, in Arabic. "Are the Princess's letters with thee?"

The sheikh took a leather bag from the front of his saddle, where it had excited the unavailing curiosity of his guests throughout the journey, and presented it respectfully.

"The Princess perceived that one of thy men was being carried in a litter, and she desired to know what had happened, and whether he was badly hurt. But who are these?" There was a wild alarm in her voice, as she caught sight of the travel-stained Norfolk suits of Mr Hicks and Mansfield, whose uniform of *abba* and *kaffiyeh* had rendered them until this moment indistinguishable from the Arabs, and she staggered back against the door-post.

"O lady, these men are the servants of the Prince of the

Jews, whom we have brought hither from Es Sham to see what is the will of the Princess concerning him. He professes much goodwill towards our tribe, desiring to enter into a treaty with the great lady, and we have perceived that he is a lucky person."

"Where is he? Let me see him." The bearers of the litter had deposited their burden upon the ground, and she bent forward to look at it. A convulsive shiver ran through her frame, and she sprang back as though she had seen a snake. "*That man?*" she ejaculated, and Mr Hicks and Mansfield both observed that her grey eyes, the only feature visible between the folds of her veil, were dilated by anger or horror until the black alone was visible. "O son of misfortune, why hast thou brought him here? He is the Princess's deadliest enemy, the man that has most injured her in all the world."

"It may be that he desires to make atonement, O lady," suggested the sheikh deprecatingly.

"To make atonement—he? Nay, rather to do more mischief," and she bestowed a dainty but vicious kick upon Cyril's unconscious form. "Take him and his companions to the vaults, O sheikh, and keep them there safely until they shall return to their own country."

"Pardon me, madam; if you would allow me a few words with you——" Mr Hicks came forward politely, and spoke in his best Arabic, but he was in difficulties with his *kaffiyeh*, which he had naturally tried to take off on addressing a lady. The heavy gold-worked handkerchief had become mixed up with the twisted cord which held it to the head, and the consciousness that he was appearing at a disadvantage embarrassed Mr Hicks seriously.

"I will not listen. Take them away. Let no more be seen of them!" cried the lady, escaping into the fortress and shutting the door behind her.

"What a fiend!" ejaculated Mansfield, with blazing eyes,

as the rattle of bolts and bars showed that there was no hope of changing her mind.

"Excitable female, any way," said Mr Hicks, his equanimity restored. "Well, sheikh, I guess you had better march us off to these vaults of yours. See what a pity it is that the Prince of the Jews wasn't on hand to blarney the lady!"

The sheikh assented gloomily, and giving an order to his followers, they retraced their steps and descended the path.

"Of course you saw that our fair friend was a European?" remarked Mr Hicks to Mansfield, as they followed the litter.

"What, that woman—that—that creature?"

"The lady who just honoured us with her attention. She wore Paris shoes, any way, and a rustling frill round the edge of her gown."

"I should think she has very good reasons for living out here, then," was the unchivalrous remark of Mansfield, for the insult offered to Cyril had made his blood boil.

"Now that I would call one of the hasty judgments of youth," drawled Mr Hicks, and said no more until they arrived at the entrance to their prison, which proved to be a cave at the foot of the hill, approached by a low doorway almost buried in the sand. A man was sent to the village for spades, and the sand was shovelled away until a large flat stone, standing more or less perpendicularly, was laid bare. This rested on rough hinges cut in the rock, and opened inwards like a door. All was dark inside, but it seemed cool and airy. Mr Hicks struck a match. Furniture there was none, with the exception of various heaps of broken pottery and fragments of rock, and what seemed a series of colossal bookshelves lining the walls.

"Look here, sheikh," said the American, "you've got to give us food and lights, and some tent-cloth to sleep on, if you run this high-class hotel."

"What will the Princess say?" was the lugubrious reply.

"What will she say when the Prince of the Jews speaks with her and tells her how badly you treated us?"

"It shall be done, *Khawaja*," and the sheikh gave the necessary orders, which resulted in the arrival soon afterwards of three native lamps, with a supply of oil, some fresh bread and a further provision of the detestable compound of dates, and three pieces of goat's-hair cloth. Meanwhile, Mansfield had been laboriously bringing in sand, a spadeful at a time, thus forming a substructure on which one of the tent-cloths was laid to make a bed for Cyril. Then the door was shut, and the prisoners were left to their reflections.

"They may call this place the house of the Lady Zenobia as much as they like," said Mr Hicks aggressively, "but I'll stick out that it was the Lady Zenobia's burying-lot, no less."

"This place—a mausoleum?" asked Mansfield, with marked disgust.

"I guess so. Look at those shelves—all empty, of course; but there's a choice collection of miscellaneous remains in the room down the passage there, where the light comes in through a hole in the roof. The Arabs have rifled the place, you bet, and lugged the corpses into daylight that they might be sure of missing nothing. All mummied, of course, so you needn't look so sick."

"But we can't stay here!" cried Mansfield, in horror.

"I guess we've got to. The lady upstairs don't calculate to be trifled with, you see. But I've slept in many worse locations than this, for it's clear that the last interment took place several hundreds of thousands of years back, so the deceased won't interfere with our physical comfort; and if you see a ghost, just hurry up and tell me, and I'll interview him for the 'Crier.' Suppose you fly around and fix things up for the night now. Our supper don't need much cooking, unfortunately, but the water's good, any way. You might put out two of those lamps, for it's past sundown, and I'd as lief keep a light going all night. Guess we'll fix up one of

these pieces of tent-cloth to keep off the draught from that passage. I'm going to sit up with the boss, so I'm better without a bed."

"No," said Mansfield, "I'm going to look after him."

"Young man," said Mr Hicks firmly, "this is my funeral. Your turn will come to-morrow night, but as the distinguished sufferer's medical attendant, I calculate to do my obvious duty to-night. The boss is taking a fine spell of rest just now, breathing natural, pulse regular, everything first-rate, but I must be on hand when he wakes up. Now don't turn nasty, or I'll sit up next night as well. I'm a peaceable man, but when I get riz, there's likely to be unpleasantness."

Accepting the inevitable with the worst possible grace, Mansfield prepared the supper, assisted in hanging the curtain, and finally betook himself to his couch of hair-cloth, where he muffled his head in his cloak in the way he had learnt from the Arabs, and was fast asleep in two minutes. He slept until late the next day, and was only awakened by the voices of Cyril and Mr Hicks, as they expressed their heartfelt admiration of his powers of slumber, and suggested exhibiting him to the Arabs as one of the Seven Sleepers. Cyril was in the wildest spirits. The fatigue of the journey seemed to have altogether passed away, and Mr Hicks's account of the lady at the gateway and her ungracious behaviour had filled him with delight. Mr Hicks, on the contrary, was more silent than usual, and offered presently to show Mansfield a rock-cut swimming-bath, supplied with water from the reservoir of which the Arabs had spoken, which he had discovered while exploring one of the passages branching from the cave. After a few moments' silence, as they groped their way between the rocky walls, he turned suddenly.

"Mr Mansfield, do I look like a man that would see ghosts?"

"No, I should say not," replied Mansfield, holding up the lamp to scrutinise his companion's features; "but you look as if you had seen one now," he added maliciously.

"That is so, Mr Mansfield. Or I have seen an apparition of a surprising character, any way. About midnight I was sitting on a rock beside the boss, and figuring out what I might clear by transporting to the States that whole cargo of damaged Palmyrene antiquities in the cellar back of ours, and selling them in small quantities to local museums, when I distinctly saw that curtain move that we fixed up. You bet I kept my eyes nailed on it. Well, it was drawn back slightly, and there was an old woman—a little old woman—standing in the passage, wrapped in a white sheet, like our friend at the door above, but I could see her whole face. She never saw me, for the light was between us; but she took a step forward and looked at the boss. I guess I was hasty, but I cocked my six-shooter. She heard me, and in the minutest fraction of a second she was gone. I caught up the light, and made tracks after her, but there was nothing to be seen. I searched every inch of the passage and the cave where the remains are, but she wasn't there, and there is no means of getting out that way, unless she slithered up the roof to the hole where the light comes in, and that isn't what you would expect of an elderly female of respectable appearance."

"But was she a European, as you said the other one was?"

"Can't say, Mr Mansfield. One old woman is pretty much like another. Maybe she was the ghost of the Lady Zenobia. If that is so, I've lost the best chance a newspaper man ever had, and I can tell you I feel real mean."

"Well," said Mansfield, with ungenerous exultation, "I can tell you something, and that is, it's *my* funeral to-night. You haven't said anything to the Count?"

"Do I look such a fool as all that, sir? But I'm real down. You could most trample on me. I guess I ought to shove you into the swimming-bath for your impudence, and I would do it, too, if it wasn't that maybe you would catch

cold," and having launched this Parthian shaft, Mr Hicks departed.

When Mansfield returned to the cave, he found that Cyril was giving audience to the sheikh, who had come to announce their fate to the prisoners. They need cherish no hope of being admitted to the presence of the Princess, or even to an interview with her secretary. The doors of the fortress were irrevocably closed against them, and they would remain in their gloomy prison until they chose to return to civilisation, when they would be escorted across the desert and set down in the neighbourhood of Damascus. The sheikh's mental discomfort as he made this announcement was very evident, and it was clear that he feared Cyril's wrath only less than that of his sovereign; but the placid smile with which his message was received served to reassure him, and he retired puzzled but contented. Cyril remained in high spirits all day, his gaiety only increasing towards evening. It was in vain that Mr Hicks attempted to write to his paper, and that Mansfield sat down resolutely with the intention of renovating the clothes of the party, for he gave them no peace. He had a plan, which he persisted in setting before them, conceived in the regulation boys'-book-of-adventure style, for overpowering the sheikh and the guard outside the cave, and scaling the walls of the fortress by the aid of rope-ladders made of twisted strips of hair-cloth, thus literally "dropping in" on the Princess with an urgency that would admit of no denial. He seemed unable to turn his mind to anything else, and at last Mr Hicks took the matter into his own hands.

"Say, Count," he observed, as he returned, carrying a tray, from a colloquy at the prison-door with some person unknown, "I guess it's my duty as your medical adviser to warn you against all this excitement. Now here's some real good coffee that the sheikh has sent us, and I've concluded to allow you a cup if you'll do your level best to sleep after it, but otherwise not so much as a drop."

"Tyrant!" groaned Cyril. "You know that two days ago we should have been thankful to get drinkable water, but that, having got it, the soul of man refuses to be satisfied without coffee, especially when you tantalise him with the smell. Well, I give in." He took the cup and sipped it, but his tone changed immediately. "Hicks, you villain! you've put some beastly stuff into this coffee."

"Just to make you sure of a night's rest, Count. How do you intend to go on the bust to-morrow if you don't sleep?"

The narcotic produced the desired effect, and before long Cyril was sleeping as soundly as he had done the night before. As soon as this had become evident, Mansfield jumped up.

"Now then, Hicks, off you go!" he said, "and no keeping awake, mind. Honour bright!"

"Honest Injun!" assented Mr Hicks, accepting his dismissal to the recess which Mansfield had occupied the night before. "Guess I couldn't keep awake if I tried, any way. But mind, you're to call me if there's any spiritual manifestation."

"If I can do it without disturbing the manifestation," agreed Mansfield, and went on with his preparations for observing, in a thoroughly scientific spirit, any phenomenon that might occur. He looped back the curtain which had been hung over the entrance to the passage, and arranged his bed directly opposite the opening, so that he could command both sides of the passage as far as the light of the lamp would extend. The lamp itself he placed in such a position that he himself was left in shadow, while the eyes of any intruder would be dazzled. Then he wrapped himself in his cloak, leaving a peep-hole through which he could see without being seen, lay down with his cocked revolver in his hand, and waited.

He waited so long, with every sense on the alert, yet dis-

turbed only by purely imaginary noises, that he rebuked himself impatiently when it seemed to him that he felt a breath of cold air in his face, and that he heard at the same moment a slight rustle. But no, this time there was no delusion. From the darkness of the passage emerged the little old woman of whom Mr Hicks had spoken. She gave a quick glance round the cave, then turned her head for a moment, and a taller woman, also wrapped in the swathing white draperies, followed her out into the light. Mansfield's heart stood still as the two white figures moved softly to Cyril's side, and stood looking down at him. Could they intend to murder him? But even as he raised his revolver noiselessly to cover them, the taller woman's veil dropped from her face, and he saw that her hands were clasped convulsively on her breast. Still she stood looking down at the sleeper, until her companion touched her gently, when, to Mansfield's utter bewilderment, she stooped and kissed Cyril softly on the forehead. The old woman drew her away, and they vanished.

CHAPTER XVII.

FACE TO FACE.

"MANSFIELD, was any one in here last night?"

"Why—er—how do you mean, Count? Oh, when the sheikh's son brought the coffee?"

"No, no, much later than that. Was there any one?"

"I—I suppose there must have been. I don't know."

"But why do you suppose so? because I ask you, or because you saw some one? Why can't you say?"

"Because I am not sure. I saw something."

"But what could it have been if it was not a person? a ghost?"

An embarrassed laugh from Mansfield revealed that the chance shot had hit the mark, and Cyril's eyes gleamed with mischievous delight.

"Come, this is interesting! Let us hear about it."

"Well, Count, I saw—at least, I thought I saw—two ladies come into the cave from the passage and look at you."

"How flattering! Did you see their faces?"

"The first lady was old and bent. I think Mr Hicks caught sight of her the night before, and frightened her away. There was nothing particular about her face. The other was taller, but not really tall. She let her veil fall when she was standing beside you, and I saw that her hair was white, but her face looked quite young—comparatively."

Cyril closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again slowly. "And did she do nothing but look at me?"

"She clasped her hands—like this. I don't know whether it was because she was glad or sorry."

"Is that all? You are sure there was nothing else?"

"She—she stooped down and—and kissed you, Count." Mansfield's abashed voice would have provoked his auditor to laughter at any other moment, but now Cyril only nodded approvingly.

"I thought I couldn't have dreamt it. And after that?"

"They slipped back into the passage, and disappeared suddenly. I can't find any door through which they could have gone."

"Well, we can think of that presently. I am heartily obliged to you, Mansfield. It's a comfort to have a man about one who can tell his tale sensibly, without interlarding it with wretched feeble jokes. Any one could make a joke of this affair, no doubt, but not when it is looked at in the proper light. Of course you know who the lady is?"

"I, Count?" Mansfield's astonished face attested his ignorance sufficiently.

"It has never once struck you that the Queen of the Desert and Queen Ernestine are one and the same person? Nor that one of the letters which the sheikh carried in that leather bag of his was from Fräulein von Staubach, and contained the news of your invasion of Brutli, and identified me with the Prince of the Jews?"

"But how long have you known it? and why didn't you——"

"Share my knowledge with you? Because I thought that you and Hicks deserved a little punishment for mixing yourselves up in my affairs. I have not known the truth long, of course. When Fräulein von Staubach told you that she could not mention my name to the Queen for a fortnight, that set me on the track. Some time ago I chanced to hear

that the Queen had held out for a whole fortnight before she would consent to see some one. Of course she was being sent for from here. When the coincidence had once flashed upon my mind, everything was clear—the Queen's persistent isolation on the one hand, and the extraordinary proceedings of the Arab Princess on the other. The rescue of the persecuted tribe, the idea of obtaining the mediation of the Empress of Pannonia—who is Queen Ernestine's sister-in-law—and the threatened appeal to the Powers, are all characteristic of her. Then you know that no one ever heard of the Queen of the Desert until two years ago, which corresponds roughly with the time Queen Ernestine disappeared from the public gaze. My hypothesis accounted for all the facts, and you see it was correct."

"But how can you be sure, when you didn't see the lady last night?"

Cyril smiled impatiently. "My dear Mansfield, I felt she was there. That's enough for me. Did Hicks see her?"

"No, he was asleep."

"Then I think you need only mention to him that you saw his old lady of the night before. Hicks is a good fellow enough, but there are times when he would sell his soul to purchase a sensation for his paper. It is just like the Queen to have made this midnight expedition, but you needn't—I don't want——"

"Oh, I understand," said Mansfield hastily. "He shall never hear about it from me."

"And now, Mansfield, we will make a searching investigation of the walls of the passage. I want to find that secret door through which the ladies came and went, and then we will pay them a visit."

Mr Hicks, returning at this moment from conferring with the sheikh on the subject of a change of food for the party, was duly informed of the reappearance of his ghost, and joined with extreme zeal in the hunt for the door, although a

close observer might have perceived that when his face was turned away from the others it underwent a series of extraordinary contortions, suggestive of suppressed mirth. For some time the search was fruitless, the smooth surface of the rock on both sides of the passage displaying no indication of any joint or crack, even when examined minutely with the aid of a lamp.

"Mansfield," said Cyril at last, "lie down where you were last night, and tell me exactly how far the lady had got when she disappeared."

Mansfield obeyed, and was able to indicate the spot with tolerable precision, by estimating its distance from the edge of the curtain.

"Now, Hicks," said Cyril, "the lamp here, please. I think we may be pretty sure that the door is in the left-hand wall, as that is the side on which the hill is, and I should imagine we shall find the spring two or three feet either to the right or the left of the point at which the lady vanished."

He began to test the wall by pressing it carefully with his fingers, keeping his left hand a few inches higher than his right, and before very long Mr Hicks gave a shout.

"You've hit it, Count! I saw something give that time, and here's a break in the wall ahead of you. Guess you'd better let me help you shove."

But the stone door moved so easily upon its pivot that this was unnecessary. It swung open without the slightest sound, revealing the foot of a flight of steps cut in the rock.

"Now this is what I call real thoughtful of the Lady Zenobia," said Mr Hicks. "If she found it necessary to assist a friend into the next world, there was no need to have corpses lying around upstairs. She could plant them out in her lot down here quite comfortably, and no one the wiser."

"Now," said Cyril, panting a little, "you and I will make a voyage of discovery, Mansfield. Do you know, Hicks, I

think your nocturnal visitor must be an old acquaintance of mine, Baroness von Hilfenstein? I needn't tell you in whose household she is, and you won't be surprised to hear that I intend to make a call on her."

"You don't calculate to leave me out of the party, Count, I hope?"

"I'm afraid I must on this occasion. Who is to receive the sheikh and bamboozle him as to our doings, if we all go? He would scour the passages, thinking we were trying to escape, and we should be brought back before we could do anything."

"That's so, sir. Go ahead," and Mr Hicks got out his fountain pen and his writing-pad, and set to work on a letter to his paper, while Mansfield, by Cyril's directions, made himself as smart as his extremely limited resources allowed. His employer was one of those fortunate people who contrive always to be presentable in spite of the most adverse circumstances, but he displayed unwonted anxiety about his appearance on this occasion, and Mr Hicks smiled grimly as he closed the stone door upon the flickering light carried by Mansfield.

"You ought to have known me better, Count. As if all this prinking wouldn't tell me what was on hand even if I hadn't used my eyes last night! You deserve I should make a real blood-curdling, soul-thrilling, romantic, pathetic life-drama out of you and your Queen, but you and I are partners, and I'm on the square, any way."

The rock-cut staircase up which Cyril and Mansfield made their way was narrow and winding, but quite dry, and the edges of the stone were as sharp as if they had only been hewn a day. Air was admitted from the outer world by means of shafts reaching to the face of the rock, but these were too small to allow the entrance of more than a ray of light, which served to increase by contrast the surrounding darkness. A quantity of sand, admitted in the course of

ages through these air-shafts, was heaped in the corners, but Cyril pointed out to Mansfield that the flowing robes of the nocturnal visitors had swept a clear pathway in the middle of the steps. The two men went on, up and up, now turning to the right and now to the left, sometimes finding themselves on ground which was almost level, and again confronted with steps nearly two feet high, until there was a change in the sound of their echoing footsteps, and they discovered that instead of solid rock the walls and roof were now of masonry.

"This is the wall of the fortress, then!" said Cyril. "Interesting question where we shall come out—in the palace itself, or hopelessly outside."

He was hot and panting, and his voice vibrated strangely. Mansfield suggested a rest, but he shook his head. "No, no," he said impatiently; "let us go through with it now, and know the worst."

The passage ended abruptly in a stone door like that by which they had left the cave. Mansfield pushed it open, cautiously at first, for in the blinding glare of sunlight into which it admitted them they could not at once see where they were. Then came disappointment. True, they stood inside the circuit of the vast wall visible from the plain, but before them loomed the huge side of the palace, blank and windowless, built of immense blocks of bevelled stone. Travelling upwards from one course of Cyclopean masonry to another, the eye could discover no opening into the interior of the building until it reached the colonnade supported on columns which crowned the roof. Between the palace and the outer wall was a space of waste ground overgrown with coarse dry grass and low bushes, and Mansfield crept softly among the scattered rocks and fragments of carved stone, which lay everywhere around, towards the back of the building, and peered round the corner.

"Nothing there but a few servants' huts and attempts at gardening—certainly no door into the palace," he whispered, returning.

"Very well, we will try this way," said Cyril, turning to the right, but here again was disappointment. The entrance to the palace was before them, indeed—a huge pillared portico with great stone doors; but these were as closely shut as the wooden gate facing them, which the angry lady had fastened behind her two days before. A small grated window above the door was the only opening here, and it was far beyond even Mansfield's reach. But Cyril did not exhibit any sign of discouragement.

"Take one," he said, sitting down at the base of one of the columns and holding out his cigar-case. "There are only two left, but Sir Philip Sidney's generosity was nothing to mine when there is anything to be gained by it. What I want to gain just now is an interview with the lady of the gateway, whom I take to be Princess Anna Mirkovics."

Mansfield obeyed, much puzzled, and they smoked in silence for some minutes. Then a female voice, speaking in German, broke the stillness.

"Those servants again!" it said. "How often have I forbidden them to smoke in the neighbourhood of the Queen's apartments! They know how much she dislikes the smell. Which of them can it be?"

"Drawn!" whispered Cyril. "Though it is a little hard to have one's best cigars mistaken for the stuff these fellows smoke, isn't it?"

"Markor! Zachary! Johannes! which of you is smoking out there?" cried the voice, which Mansfield recognised as that of the lady of the gateway, in Arabic, and her face appeared at the window. She recoiled precipitately when she saw Cyril, who bowed to her with the utmost politeness.

"You here!" she cried, her eyes dilating as they had done before. "What do you want?"

"An audience of her Majesty, mademoiselle."

"I thought so. I felt sure you would come cringing back to the woman you had wronged, but you shall not see her. I will not have her made miserable a second time by you."

"Mademoiselle, I acknowledge you readily as a true prophet—I will even confess that your reproaches are deserved—but it lies with her Majesty, and not with you, to grant or refuse me an interview."

"It does lie with me. I refuse to submit your request to her Majesty, do you understand? I take upon myself the responsibility of excluding you from her presence. You shall not tear open the cruel wound you once made. I will have you dragged back again to your prison."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle. I am master of the situation at present, for I fancy the Arabs would obey my orders—perhaps as readily as your own. In any case, the sounds of a scuffle would attract the Queen's attention."

"I have no fear of the fidelity of the Arabs, Count."

"Then pray test it, mademoiselle. I ask merely that my presence here should come to her Majesty's knowledge. Her pleasure is my law. If she refuses to grant me an audience, I will go away without another word."

"Then consider that she has refused it, for it will not be granted. I am bold enough to risk her Majesty's displeasure when it falls to me to guard her happiness. You need not hope to move me by an air of meekness, of suffering. Pray remain there in the sun the whole day. I rejoice to see you shut out—unable to reach her. Nothing could please me better."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, there is one thing wanting to complete your enjoyment. If her Majesty rejoiced to see me shut out, then you could be happy indeed. But you are

afraid to lay my request before her, because you know that she would grant it."

"I cannot stand talking all day," said the lady angrily. "You, Count, have doubtless plenty of time to spare. I hope you may enjoy yourself!"

She disappeared from the grating, and all through the long, hot, noonday hours Cyril held his ground, with Mansfield, as determined as himself, at his side. Recommended to find his way back to the cave and take counsel with Mr Hicks, Mansfield refused to leave his post in the portico. With the nature of the grudge that Princess Anna Mirkovics cherished against Count Mortimer he was unacquainted; but she seemed to have little regard for consequences provided she could obtain her revenge. In the course of the afternoon she appeared again at the window, fresh from a cool siesta—so, with a refinement of cruelty, she informed them—and jeered at Cyril's persistence in remaining where he was not wanted, and where he could do no good. Even Mansfield grew faint-hearted after this. Cyril's paleness and evident exhaustion alarmed him, and he suggested a retreat to the cave and the employment of Mr Hicks as ambassador. But Cyril was resolute.

"I'll stay here till I get in, or die on her doorstep!" he said fiercely, and Mansfield offered no further suggestions. Their patience met with its reward at last, although this would scarcely have happened had Princess Anna been able to resist informing Cyril that the Queen was about to spend the evening in the garden, and he might therefore give up the hope of attracting her attention. Scarcely had she departed when another face appeared at the grating, that of Baroness von Hilfenstein, coming to see who it was that had been conversing in French with her colleague.

"You here, Count!" she said, with reproachful incredulity. "This is a—a—an unpleasant surprise."

"Baroness, you are very cruel, when I have spent the whole day here in the hope of catching a glimpse of you."

"You can hardly expect me to believe that, Count."

"Even though you know you are going to get me an interview with the Queen?"

The Baroness threw up her hands. "Not that, Count, not that!" she pleaded piteously. "You would not make such an inexpedient, ill-timed request?"

"But I do make exactly that request, Baroness. One word with her Majesty—that will tell me all I want to know."

"But, my dear Count," said the old lady persuasively, "you must really be patient. Her Majesty was quite gratified—yes, I think I may without impropriety use the word—to hear from Fräulein von Staubach that you were anxious to wait upon her, and I think it is extremely probable that she will command your presence when the Court returns to Brutli. But now—I really could not say how she would receive this unfortunate application of yours!"

"I will take my chance of that, Baroness. And here I stay until you assure me that her Majesty positively refuses to receive me."

"Now, Count, be reasonable." The Baroness was much distressed by Cyril's persistence. "I am sure you don't wish to involve her Majesty in any unpleasantness? And poor dear Princess Anna, who has made such sacrifices, and shown such devotion to the Queen, would almost break her heart if she saw you received in audience. You see, she does not even know of Fräulein von Staubach's letter—I happened to be in attendance when her Majesty opened it, and we thought it better to—to spare her feelings. Of course you understand?"

"Am I to understand that Princess Anna's feelings will be considered before mine? I know I have not deserved consideration, but——"

"Her Majesty is all consideration, Count. She knows that

the Prince of the Jews is here, for one of the Armenian servants heard it from the Arabs, but she believes you think she is at Brutli. She is able to identify the Prince of the Jews, but she does not know that you have found out who the Queen of the Desert is."

"I see," said Cyril meditatively. "Then this explains why you played the ghost the night before last, Baroness—and last night also?"

"Count!" The poor Baroness renounced the unequal struggle. "You knew it all the time, then? I was overpersuaded—her Majesty insisted—I was horrified, but still—Oh, come in, Count," she began to unfasten the door. "You must say what you like to the Queen. I might have known that if you were determined to get in you would. Will your—your suite accompany you?" glancing doubtfully at Mansfield.

"I am afraid I shall need his arm," said Cyril, with a laugh. He was shaking from head to foot as Mansfield helped him through the doorway and across the paved hall into which it led. The Baroness, in a state of extreme trepidation, went before them, turning at every few steps to hasten them on, or warn them not to speak, but they met no one. A door at the farther end of the long hall led into an inner courtyard, which was partially laid out as a garden, and surrounded by a half-ruined colonnade, entwined with gourds and other creeping plants. In the shade of the dwarf palms and shrubs at the opposite side could be seen two white-robed figures.

"Her Majesty walks here in the evenings," said the Baroness, with a gasp of uncontrollable excitement, "and Princess Anna is with her. When they pass this doorway you must do what you think best," and she fled back into the hall.

"Mansfield! when she comes, help me to kneel down, and then make yourself scarce," said Cyril breathlessly.

He was gripping Mansfield's arm hard as they stood in the shadow of the doorway, and the two women, unconscious of their presence, came slowly towards them. Anna Mirkovics seemed to be talking excitedly, regardless of etiquette, but the Queen paid little or no attention to her, pacing the time-worn stones in silence, with her eyes on the ground, and a half-smile upon her lips.

"Surely, madame, you were not really thinking of returning to Brutli at present?" cried her companion, as they turned the corner.

"Now!" panted Cyril to Mansfield, and as the Queen approached he fell on his knees before her. She started back, and Anna Mirkovics screamed. Mansfield had retreated swiftly into the doorway.

"*Cyril!*" cried the Queen, irrepressible joy in her voice; then, more doubtfully, "Is it you, Count?"

"My dearest, forgive me!"

"Madame!" Anna Mirkovics had recovered herself, "allow me to have this person removed. Is he to be permitted to intrude himself upon you in this insolent manner? Madame, you will not suffer him to approach you?"

"Anna, you forget yourself." The maid of honour shrank before the tone, and the gesture with which the Queen waved her aside, but she made another valiant effort.

"Oh, madame, listen to me for one moment! You know how I love you—that I would give everything I have in the world to provide a moment's happiness for you. Don't expose yourself again to this man's cruelty. He returns to you merely that he may gratify his ambition. He cannot love. Trust me, madame; I love you better than my life."

"I am in your hands, Ernestine," said Cyril faintly. "If you command me to leave you, I will go at once."

"To leave me, when I have been waiting years for you? I knew you would come back, Cyril, but I was often sick with longing. Go, Anna; you do not understand. If Count

Mortimer were to forsake me again to-morrow, I would welcome him now."

"Oh, my dearest, I have not deserved this!" broke from Cyril. "That day—that day—when you knelt to me, and I would not listen——"

"Don't, don't!" murmured the Queen painfully. "I can't bear to remember it. Oh, Cyril, you would not even send me a kind word! You did not know how I loved you, or you could not have been so cruel."

"I didn't even know how I loved you, Ernestine. I thought it was all over, but I have never had a happy moment since."

"I am so glad!" she replied, with a radiant smile. "That is selfish of me, isn't it? but I was always jealous of your policy, you know. Cyril, my beloved, if you knew how I have prayed for this day! I used to wish that I might die, because I thought you would come to me if I was dying. But now—oh, I am too happy! No, you are not to kiss my hands. Come and sit here, and tell me what you have been doing all these years."

A despairing groan at his side made Mansfield start, as he stood in the shadowy hall, out of earshot of the garden. Turning quickly, he saw Cyril leading the Queen to a seat, and found that Princess Anna, in the shadows beside him, was also a witness of the reconciliation. The sight seemed to destroy her self-command altogether, for she fell upon him as the nearest victim, and stormed at him in Thracian for some minutes. Then, either because her anger had exhausted itself, or because she was mollified by his enforced meekness under her attack, she burst into tears, and was led away, sobbing bitterly, by Baroness von Hilfenstein, who appeared opportunely from out of the gloom.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PENALTY OF GREATNESS.

"WELL, gentlemen!" said Mr Hicks, as Cyril, holding tightly to Mansfield's arm, stumbled painfully into the cave about sunset, "I'm glad to see you, any way, for I had a notion that the gateway lady might have fixed you both up with safer quarters than these, but I guess the distinguished patient is about played-out?"

"Never felt better in my life!" returned Cyril, collapsing on his bed. "Don't plague me to-night, Hicks. I shall be as fit as possible after a good rest."

"No, sir. I think I see myself allowing you to die of starvation. Joy may seem to answer every demand of a man's nature, but it don't serve him instead of his regular meals. Come, you don't incline to give her Majesty the trouble of coming all this way down to see you again right now, do you?"

"Then you were awake after all?" said Cyril, accepting meekly the bowl of broth which Mr Hicks forced upon him. "I thought your sleep was suspiciously profound."

"Well, Count, I don't mind allowing that I wasn't as fast asleep as I looked. But I was on my honour not to interfere with Mr Mansfield's plan of campaign, and I didn't. For the rest, you may be sure that the grave isn't a circumstance to me in the matter of discreet silence."

"I haven't a doubt of it. Well, this soup of yours has waked me up pretty thoroughly, so I may as well explain things a little to the two of you, for I can see you are both palpitating with curiosity. It seems that when the Queen was obliged to leave Thracia, she chose Brutli as her place of refuge, for family reasons. The senior deaconess was once betrothed to one of the Schwarzwald-Molzau princes, but he died just when the family had given their consent to his marrying her. The sisters received the Queen most kindly, but she found that her steps were continually dogged by spies. The Princess of Dardania was anxious to have it thought she was mad, and seems to have left no means untried to make her so. It was partly this perpetual espionage that made her refuse to admit any man to her presence, and partly—well, that was my fault."

"Very natural in the circumstances, Count." Mr Hicks's comment was diplomatically ambiguous.

"Of course such seclusion only gave colour to her cousin's inventions, and the Queen and her ladies saw this. It was Mlle. Mirkovics who devised a plan of relief. She was in Damascus when the Vali arrested the Beni Ismail for non-payment of their tribute, and she told the Queen about it. Her Majesty was so much affected and distressed that Princess Anna, to please her, paid up the arrears of tribute through the sheikh. After such kindness as that, he could not refuse to answer the questions she asked him about the unknown desert in which his tribe were said to live, and he even offered to guide her to this place, Sitt Zeynab, thinking that all Europeans were interested in antiquities. The tribe had kept it in some sort of repair as a fortress for use in war-time, but they preferred sticking to their tents in the oasis whenever they could. It seems to have struck her that this might afford the Queen the refuge of which she felt the need, and when the sheikh came to her in his next trouble she made a bargain with him. The Queen induced the Empress of

Pannonia to use her influence at Czarigrad, so saving the tribe from deportation, and they accepted her as their ruler. They have really made rather a good thing out of it, for they have been provided with food, and had their tribute paid, on condition that they robbed no more caravans. Of course the Vali and Mahmud Fadil know the truth about the mysterious Princess, but they have accepted a present to hold their tongues, and they are honourable men."

"But General Banics and M. Stefanovics—don't they know?" cried Mansfield. "To keep them there at Brutli eating their hearts out——"

"The Queen told me herself that she had entreated them to return to Thracia, but they refused to go. No, they do not know. It was impossible to confide the secret to them, for the Princess of Dardania's emissaries are buzzing round them continually. Naturally Madame Stefanovics knows the truth, for she spends part of every day at the Institute, with the lady who is left there to delude the Queen's visitors. Mlle. Mirkovics and Fräulein von Staubach spend alternate months here and at Brutli, and do their best to account for the fortnight which must pass before the Queen can be seen, or can give an answer to any question."

"Guess it's a queer life here for a set of lone women," remarked Mr Hicks.

"The Queen seems to have found it rather peaceful than otherwise. They have plenty of servants—fugitive Armenians who were glad to find a refuge here with their wives and children—and the Arabs are wonderfully amenable. They have lost their old occupation of highway robbery, but they find it rather interesting, for a change, to mislead inquisitive travellers, and they appear to be taking kindly to the cultivation of their oasis. The Queen is much too devoted to the tribe to take leave of them altogether, but I think they will be able to get on with an occasional visit."

"When her Majesty and you are reigning at Jerusalem?"

There was a touch of awe in Mr Hicks's voice. "Well, Count, I have always reckoned you the most almighty successful man of my acquaintance—with runs of bad luck now and then, of course, like the rest of us—but you bet I never thought of anything like this. You start right away into the desert on the maddest freak in creation, and it brings you out just where you calculated to be, and fixes you up with the finest future a man could desire. But then you started with getting round the twelve tribes of Israel, and the man that can do that has little to learn, even with regard to the female persuasion."

"You see, once I had the clue, the whole mystery surrounding the Queen of the Desert vanished away," said Cyril. "It is rather hard on Mlle. Mirkovics, for I am convinced that one of her reasons for bringing the Queen here was the desire to remove her beyond the reach of my baleful influence, but that is the way things happen in this world. By the bye, the Queen would like me to present you both to her to-morrow, so be prepared."

"Count," said Mr Hicks warningly, "I'm a plain American citizen, whose intercourse with kings and queens and courts has been strictly professional. Do you ask me to compromise my independence right now by figuring round as a member of your suite?"

"No, I don't," said Cyril, while Mansfield laughed, remembering the Baroness's description of himself; "I want to introduce you both, as my friends, to the lady who is going to do me the honour of marrying me. She knows that I owe my life to you both several times over, and that I couldn't have got here without you."

"Shake, Count!" said Mr Hicks; "you're a white man, sir. And if it would make you any happier, you may bet your last red cent I would go so far as to put on a Court suit for the occasion, if you had one here and offered it me."

With this magnanimous surrender on Mr Hicks's part, the conversation ended, and on the morrow it appeared that he was highly dissatisfied with the meagreness of the preparation it was possible to make for his visit to the Queen. His travel-worn clothes and the helmet in which he had ridden out of Damascus were the objects of much anxious care, and he went so far as to offer to part with his cherished beard, if Cyril thought well, but the sacrifice was gratefully declined. Little time was allowed for personal decoration, since the prisoners had scarcely finished breakfast when the sheikh made his appearance, his demeanour betokening a vast increase of respect, to the extent even of sending a messenger in advance, to ask whether the Prince of the Jews would receive him. On entering, he bowed to the ground before Cyril.

"O my lord, the Princess desires thee and thy servants to come to her. 'Where are my friends?' she says. 'Bring them here, that I may make with them the treaty that they desire.' O my lord, how is this? It has never been the pleasure of the Princess heretofore that any stranger should approach her."

"What did I tell you?" asked Cyril, through Mr Hicks. "Didn't I say that the Princess would receive me and enter into a treaty?"

"O my lord, thy words sounded in the ears of thy servant as foolishness, but they have indeed proved true. My lord will speak favourably of his servant before the Princess?"

"By all means," said Cyril pleasantly, as the sheikh drew back to allow him to pass out of the cave. Once outside, the whole party mounted their horses, and rode up the hill-path in state, escorted by the tribesmen, who discharged their guns at intervals to do honour to the mighty stranger. Arrived at the gate, where the Armenian servants were drawn up in line to receive the visitors, the sheikh alone

entered with his guests. Just as the gate was closing, Mansfield uttered an exclamation.

"There are two men on camels riding across the desert from the direction of Damascus!" he cried. "They are kicking up a tremendous cloud of dust, so they must be coming fast."

"It is doubtless a post bringing letters for the Princess," said the sheikh; "but I know not why there should be two men. See, the watchman has observed them," as a shot rang out from the lofty tower on the wall. "Word will be brought at once if there is any ill news."

They passed on through the portico into the great hall, and paused before the doorway of a room opening from it on the left. A servant drew aside the curtain, and revealed Queen Ernestine enthroned upon a marble seat, with Baroness von Hilfenstein and Mlle. Mirkovics standing behind her. All three ladies were swathed from head to foot in white *isars*, but the sheikh prostrated himself without venturing to steal a glance at them, and remained with his forehead touching the ground.

"Behold, O great Princess, the Prince of the Jews," he said. "He is come to learn thy will concerning his nation."

"It is well," said the Queen, through Princess Anna. "My scribe shall declare to him my pleasure, and do thou wait without to conduct him back to his lodging when the audience is over."

The sheikh retired, quitting the awful presence of his sovereign with unconcealed willingness, and when he was safely out of sight the ladies relieved the Queen of her veil. After a word or two with Cyril, she turned to Mr Hicks and Mansfield with a smile that won their hearts for ever.

"Count Mortimer's friends are mine," she said, stepping forward and holding out a hand to each; "and he has told me what good friends you have been to him. Please do not

think I shall be jealous of his affection for you. I know that I owe this meeting to your fidelity to him."

To Cyril's intense delight, that sturdy republican, Mr Hicks, dropped on one knee to kiss the Queen's hand, as though to the manner born, murmuring:

"If I were Count Mortimer's deadliest enemy, madame, I guess the inducement you offer would make me friends with him right away."

"I know your story," said the Queen softly to Mansfield, as he kissed her hand in silence, unable to utter a word. "Consider me your friend, and let me assure you that Count Mortimer is also on your side. When one is happy oneself, one is always eager to make others so."

Cyril smiled involuntarily, as he wondered in what light the Queen would regard Mansfield's love-story when she heard of her son's admiration for Philippa, and there was the faintest ghost of a bitter laugh from Mlle. Mirkovics. A pained look crossed the Queen's face, but before she could speak, the sheikh's voice was heard on the other side of the curtain, very close to the ground.

"Let the Princess pardon the presumption of her servant, but word is come for the Prince of the Jews, entreating him to return immediately to Es Sham. The messenger has travelled day and night."

Mlle. Mirkovics interpreted the words, and the Queen's eyes filled with tears as they met Cyril's. He had made an involuntary movement towards the door, but her gaze of entreaty drew him back.

"I am at your commands, madame," he said, with forced calmness.

"If I ask you, you will stay?" she said, too low for the rest to hear, and her eyes marked, almost with agony, the struggle in his face.

"I will stay, Ernestine—if you ask me," he replied at last. He spoke without enthusiasm, but with the desperate

resolution to atone by one tremendous sacrifice for his past sins against her.

"But I don't ask you. You must go—at once, if it is necessary. But come to me before you start, and tell me what has happened. Messieurs," she turned again to Mr Hicks and Mansfield, "I regret to have had so little conversation with you. We must meet again—at Brutli, I hope. There is much that I wish to ask you."

Again the gleam of that dazzling smile, for which, as Mr Hicks confided afterwards to Mansfield, he would have walked round the world, and the visitors retired. The moment they were gone, the Queen turned to Anna Mirkovics.

"Anna, you have disappointed me—grieved me bitterly. You will not forget!"

"How can I forget, madame? He leaves you now—even now—in a moment, for his policy."

"I told him to go. He would have stayed. Why will you not consent to be happy, since I am? It breaks my heart to see how you hate him."

"Madame, I do rejoice to see you happy. There is nothing I desire more on earth. But I cannot forget. In my eyes, your happiness has no foundation. My blood boils when I remember how he treated you——"

"Anna, Anna, think. I love him. Can't you understand? Don't you know what love is?"

"Alas, madame, yes! I love you."

"Then you do understand. You have borne with me, my despair, my fretfulness, my ill temper, because you love me. Your love has never failed for one moment. And that is the measure of my love for him."

"Madame, I will not have you compare yourself with him. I love your changes of mood—even your coldness. How can they make any difference to me?"

"And I love him in the same way. Come, Anna, you would

not make me miserable? How can I be happy if you persist in frowning upon my happiness?"

"Oh, you break my heart, madame! Well, then, I rejoice that you are happy, and if his Excellency continues to make you so, I shall rejoice all my life long that he has returned to you."

"That is my dear good Anna!" cried the Queen, drawing her friend's pale plain face down to hers, and kissing her on the forehead. "Hilfenstein, I must kiss you too, for you have been on my side the whole time."

"Ah, madame, I have known you a good many years, and the Count also," said the Baroness. "It would have been little use my opposing either of you. But I hear his Excellency returning. Your Majesty will receive him alone?"

The Queen's smile was a sufficient answer to the question, and both ladies disappeared hastily into the garden as Cyril entered from the hall, looking rather irritated than perturbed.

"Dearest," he said, "I think you understand that nothing but the very gravest necessity would drag me away from you at this moment, but I really must go. The blind man Yeshua has come all the way from Damascus to say that Paschies entreats me to return at once, if all that we have gained is not to be lost. Evidently something serious has happened, which I did not foresee, and which has thrown out all our calculations. Moreover, as far as I can make out, there was an unmistakable attempt made to kidnap Yeshua on his way to the spot where he always arranges to meet your scouts, and he insists that the Scythian Consulate was mixed up in it. However that may be, it seems that the Beni Ayub are out on the warpath as well, for they chased Yeshua and your tribesman who was bringing him here. They only shook them off when they got to the waterless desert. It may be a mere coincidence, but it looks uncommonly like an organised attempt to prevent any notice of the

danger, whatever it may be, from reaching me. At any rate, it's clear that I must go, or give up all hope of success in the great scheme."

"Yes, yes, I quite see," she replied quickly, "and I shall come back to Brutli at once. Then our engagement shall be made public, Cyril. You are going back to win success for me as well as for yourself, you know."

"Do you know that every one will say I have sought your forgiveness for the sake of the added importance that marriage with you will give me? The world hasn't very much confidence in me, Ernestine."

"But I have. Do you know what I shall do when you are Prince of Palestine? I shall lay aside my crown for a coronet. The world shall see that your wife is prouder of being Princess of Palestine than Queen of Thracia."

"My dearest, you have a way of making the world look foolish by doing lofty, Quixotic, useless things, that covers me with shame. I wish I had the knack, but no one would believe that I did them without an ulterior motive. But suppose I am not made Prince of Palestine?"

"Then we will return here together, and you shall be King of the Desert. You will unite the Arabs under one rule, and make a nation of them, and they will adore you. They are grateful to me because of what I have done for them, but they still feel a little ashamed of being ruled by a woman. They have the greatest possible respect for you already."

"Will they still respect me when I rob them of their Queen? One, or at most two visits in the year, as a respite from the cares of State, will be very different from having a resident sovereign. But dearest, you won't start for Brutli until the sheikh assures you that the way is safe? If the Beni Ayub got hold of you it would be very unpleasant personally, and absolutely distracting politically."

"Yes; I suppose Michael would feel obliged to interfere. Oh, Cyril, I wanted to speak to you about him. You

heard of that terribly sad business about Lida, of course? Well, since his engagement came to an end, Michael has written me such nice letters, so affectionate, so respectful. He says that he has turned over a new leaf, and this is because he has formed an attachment for a young lady who will be as acceptable to me as to Thracia. Do you know who she is?"

"I have an idea."

"And is it all as suitable as he thinks?"

"So far as I know, the only opposition to their engagement will come from the lady herself."

"But why? Is she as beautiful and altogether desirable as he says she is?"

"I feel some delicacy in answering that question. You see, she happens to be my niece."

"What! your brother Carlino's daughter? But, Cyril, the Thracians will go mad with joy. Is it the little girl with the beautiful golden hair whom I saw years ago at Tatarjé? She must be a good deal older than Michael, but she had such sweet ways that it is no wonder she has captivated him. He could not make a better choice. But why are you looking at me in that way, Cyril? Why should she raise any objection? It's not—oh, don't say that you have no other niece! This is not the young lady with whom that pleasant Mr Mansfield is in love?"

"Unfortunately it is."

"But she couldn't refuse Michael!"

"And yet I heard a lady propose a few minutes ago to resign a crown for the sake of her lover."

"But that is different. Your niece would be the making of Michael. Cyril, promise me you will persuade her to accept him."

"My dearest, I could not set myself a second time to interfere with the course of true love."

"But she ought—oh, Cyril, how unkind of you to remind

me of that! No, most certainly I won't try to smooth Michael's path for him. I did too much harm the last time, and it has come to nothing after all. But you do think it is her duty to marry him, don't you?"

"I fancy Phil will decide for herself where her duty lies. And really, Ernestine, it will do your boy all the good in the world to want something very much, and not be able to get it. That will make a man of him, if you like. Is that some one outside?"

"I beg your pardon, Count"—Mansfield's deprecating voice was heard from the hall—"but the horses are ready."

"Those two good fellows have been doing my packing, that I might have a longer time with you. Good-bye, my dearest. *Au revoir* at Brutli!"

"*Auf wiedersehen*, my beloved! Take care of yourself for my sake."

"By the bye, dearest, I suppose I may assure your sheikh that it's all right about the treaty, and that you have decided to maintain friendly relations with the Jews?"

"Of course you may. But politics again, Cyril! I am jealous."

The sheikh and a small band of picked men were in readiness in the desert below the fortress, all well armed, and mounted on the best horses that the tribe possessed. Yeshua and his guide were to be left behind, to give them time to recover from the fatigues of their hurried journey before undertaking another, for the sheikh had promised to conduct the travellers to Damascus by the shortest available route, involving as few halts as possible, and the hardship would be great. In spite, however, of long stages and little rest, with a meagre supply of food and water, the return from Sitt Zeynab proved much less disagreeable than the journey thither had been. The sheikh had banished from his mind the last traces of sus-

picion and enmity, and was above all things anxious to secure Cyril's friendship for his tribe, and for his tribe alone. His anxiety lest the Prince of the Jews should admit the Beni Ayub also to a share in his favour found utterance again and again, and was as amusing as was his claim to the entire ownership of the desert between Damascus and Palmyra. He went so far as to invite Cyril to aid him in maintaining his supposed rights by force of arms, but this was merely a rhetorical flourish, not intended to be taken seriously.

The first part of the journey, including the crossing of the waterless desert which was the true patrimony of the Beni Ismail, was uneventful, but no sooner had the boundary, invisible as it was to the untrained eye, been crossed, than the party became aware that they were watched. A camel and its rider would suddenly appear on the horizon, only to vanish in a cloud of dust as quickly as they had come. Sometimes these scouts would appear in the direction of Damascus, sometimes to the right or left of the line of march, but for two days they kept the travellers almost constantly in sight, without offering to approach them more closely.

"The sons of Shaitan can see us much more readily than we can see them," grumbled the sheikh, "and they are closing round us. Then they will lie in wait for us in the broken ground before reaching Es Sham."

"How would you shake them off if we were not here?" asked Cyril.

"We would lead them astray, O my lord, with feigned pursuit of their scouts, and running fights, until we were either safe on our own land or could slip through them into Es Sham, but that would need many days, and if they contrived to separate us one from another, evil might come to my lord."

"Evil might also come to some of them," suggested Cyril.

"Doubtless, but if their object is rather to delay my lord

than to hurt him, they might attain it with little danger to themselves."

"Hullo! they seem to be coming to meet us," said Mansfield, as a group of mounted men appeared from behind a sandhill some distance in front. The sheikh cast his eye over his own troop, and ordered a halt. Here on the open plain there was no possibility of an ambush, but his men unslung their long matchlocks, and the travellers looked to their rifles.

"They seem friendly," said Cyril, as the sheikh of the opposite party, distinguished by his gold-embroidered crimson cloak, rode out from among his men, making signs that he had left his weapons behind, and desired an amicable conference.

"Stay thou here, O Prince of the Jews," said the sheikh, "and let the father of a writing-book leave his gun and ride forward with me, that we may hear what this dog has to say. Never yet have I spoken in peace with a man of the Beni Ayub."

Mr Hicks, who owed his name to the note-book which was his inseparable companion, handed his rifle to Mansfield, remarking that he supposed the surrender of his revolver was not necessarily included in the bond. If it was, he had, at any rate, a weapon at hand which would astonish the Arab who tried any foolishness with him, and as he spoke he patted a coil of thin rope which he had procured at Sitt Zeynab and insisted on looping to his saddle, to the mystification of his companions. Thus provided, he rode forward with the sheikh, who halted at a discreet distance from the representative of the other party, and asked what the Beni Ayub were doing in that portion of the desert. As the district in question was claimed by the Beni Ayub, their sheikh disregarded the enquiry.

"We come in peace, O sheikh of the Beni Ismail, hearing that the Prince of the Jews is a sojourner in the tents of thy

people. Why does he pass by the Beni Ayub in his return to Es Sham? Does not the desert belong to us also? Let him turn aside and visit our tents, that we may make peace with his nation, and there be no ill blood between us."

"The Prince of the Jews will return at another time and visit you," said Mr Hicks, anticipating the angry reply which the sheikh had in preparation. "At present he is journeying to Es Sham in haste."

"What is his haste to us?" was the retort. "Shall we allow the Beni Ismail, who obey a woman, to laugh at our beards because the Prince of the Jews has sojourned among them? Let the Prince visit our tents, or we will come and take him."

"But where are your tents?" asked Mr Hicks, "and have you a sufficient number of horsemen to give fitting escort to the Prince?"

"My tents lie a day's journey on the way to Es Sham, and as thou seest, I have with me three times the number of horsemen that ride now with the Prince."

"Altogether you make out a good case for yourself," said Mr Hicks, easily. "Suppose you and your men ride ahead and get ready for us?"

"Nay, we desire to show due honour to the Prince. My company shall ride side by side with his to the tents of my people."

"Very good. But the Prince will have none but his own followers around him."

"It is well. We will but be at hand, for the safety of the Prince."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BREAKING-POINT.

RETURNING to his friends in company with the amazed and indignant sheikh of their own party Mr Hicks explained how matters stood, pointing out that discretion was pre-eminently the better part of valour on this occasion.

"The enemy are between us and Damascus, and they don't calculate to let us through," he said. "I guess the odds are a bit too long for fighting, so all we can do is to select our camping-ground with an eye to possibilities, and make tracks in the night, for if they once get us to their tents we're as good as squelched. With your leave, Count, I'll ride slightly ahead, to keep open communications with the other platform, and also to look out for a suitable location."

Leaving the scouts, who had now come in, to bring up the rear of the convoy, the sheikh of the Beni Ayub and the main body of his men took up their position in advance of the small party from Sitt Zeynab, and Mr Hicks attached himself to them, doing his best to impress the sheikh with the greatness of the Prince of the Jews. It was evident that the man was already somewhat alarmed by his own temerity in interfering with the journey of such an important personage, and Mr Hicks spared no pains to add to his uneasiness. When sunset was at hand, and the sheikh suggested that it would be advisable to halt for the night, he was told curtly

that the Prince had not yet given the signal, and when the Prince, through his representative, Mr Hicks, was pleased to direct that the journey should be at an end for the day, the spot chosen was not by any means an ideal camping-ground in the eyes of the Beni Ayub. It was a small hill—perhaps a large hillock would be a better term—accessible on one side only, and not affording space for more than Cyril and his party.

“I only hope they’ll conclude to camp all round it,” said Mr Hicks to his leader, “for then they would be so scattered that we might allow to creep through them, or charge right through at the weakest point, any way. If we could stampede the horses we could get clean away, more especially since we shall have our own men in a compact body.”

Mr Hicks’s hope proved fallacious. Making the best of a bad bargain, the sheikh decided to concentrate his forces at the foot of the slope, thus enclosing his unwilling guests in a trap, and his men set to work at once on their preparations for the night.

“Well,” said Mr Hicks grimly, “it only means that we’ve got to land the horses some way in that cañon back of us, and without making any noise about it, either. Mr Mansfield, you just set your mighty intellect to work on that problem, if you please. Now, how are we to get these chaps to believe that we allow to sit up all night?”

“Make a fire of brushwood and keep it burning,” suggested Mansfield.

“I guess the light will just about give us away if we do.”

“Make two or three small fires across the slope,” said Cyril, “as if to prevent the Arabs rushing us, and keep them low and smoky by heaping on earth as well as wood. That ought to produce the desired moral effect.”

“That’s so, sir. Well, Mr Mansfield, have you figured out anything to help us at the back there?”

"I'm going to explore as soon as the enemy have settled down to their supper," answered Mansfield, and as the result of his explorations he was able before long to announce that there existed on the steepest side of the hill an apology for a path, almost invisible to the naked eye, down which it ought to be possible to lead the horses.

"A sweet path it must be, if our friends the enemy haven't sniffed it out!" grumbled Mr Hicks; "and what a real elegant set of fools we shall look when all the horses go down ker-smash one on top of another! And what about the noise, Mr Mansfield? If you ask me, I should say there would be a good deal of promiscuous language flying around while that descent is taking place."

"Nonsense, Hicks! these Arabs can control their emotions better than that," said Cyril. "If the horses' feet are muffled, that's the only thing necessary."

"Well, we can't do more than try," said Mr Hicks resignedly. "But all the same," he added to Mansfield, "you bet I wouldn't do that but for the boss. He is chafing fit to burst, and if we got carried off to the tents of the Beni Ayub, I wouldn't answer for him. And now for our sheikh."

The sheikh approved highly of Cyril's determination to outwit the enemy, although he had little confidence in the success of the means suggested, and in order to avert suspicion the camp on the hill-top made ostentatious preparations for repose. Three men were told off to move about round the fires and keep them supplied with fuel and sand, and the rest wrapped themselves in their cloaks and lay down. As soon as all was quiet in the camp of the Beni Ayub below, one man at a time rose and crept softly to the spot where the horses were picketed. The sheikh insisted on being the first to try the path, as his horse had been trained to follow him like a dog, and to Mansfield's intense relief and secret pride the animal, its feet muffled in pieces of cloth,

picked its way down the hill after its master, reluctantly but without accident. The rest followed one by one, with more or less willingness, the men at the fires covering the occasional noises, which were unavoidable in the case of a stumble, or when a stone was set rolling, by a vigorous breaking of sticks, which sounded so distinct in the clear desert air that Mr Hicks muttered it was enough to wake all the Arabs for miles round. Then the men at the fires were called down in their turn, the last to descend exhibiting marvellous activity in producing dense clouds of smoke before he departed, and the whole of the Sitt Zeynab party stood safely in the desert with their horses. Mounting, they felt their way with extreme caution round the flank of the Beni Ayub, and resumed their interrupted journey, taking a direction that would enable them to reach Damascus without coming upon the camp to which their enemies had intended to conduct them. They had ridden some distance before any one had leisure to look round, and it was Mr Hicks who perceived first that the forsaken hill-top was no longer deserted, and uttered an exclamation. The eyes of the rest followed his, to distinguish a number of figures outlined against the red glow of the fires, which had by this time burnt up.

"That I should have been sold by a nigger chief!" groaned Mr Hicks. "All the time we were busy circumventing them, they were calculating to circumvent us, and all that old sinner's respect and veneration was only a cute dodge to put us off our guard. As soon as they guessed our stokers had sneaked off to bed, up they come to rush our camp. Well, that gentleman and I have got to meet again, and you bet he'll be surprised at the strength of my attachment for him," and again Mr Hicks patted the rope which hung from his saddle.

"The sons of Shaitan thought to laugh at our beards," said the skeikh, with a grim sound dimly suggestive of a chuckle; "but now their own faces are black. They will

not pursue us until dawn, and we may even yet out-distance them."

But in making this forecast the sheikh forgot that the enemy's horses, which had done little work the day before, were far fresher than those of his party; and it was less than an hour after sunrise when one of his men, halting a moment to repair a broken girth, called out that the pursuers were in sight. Cyril uttered an angry exclamation.

"Look here, Hicks," he said impatiently, "I can't stand any more of this foolery. I don't want bloodshed; but if these fellows will have it, they must. Our sheikh and two of his men have rifles, and with our three we can diminish the enemy's numbers effectually before they get close to us, and then the revolver will settle the matter. I can't risk losing everything merely to save the skins of the Beni Ayub."

"Gently, Count. If you once set up a blood-feud with the Beni Ayub, your chance of making friends with them in future is gone. I guess we'll keep on as hard as possible right now, so as just to separate the enemy. When we get to the locality I have in my mind, Mr Mansfield and I and the two men with rifles will stay behind and go on the shoot, while you ride ahead with the sheikh and the rest and draw the enemy into chasing you."

"Do you think it likely," irritably, "that I shall consent to save myself at the risk of your lives? We shall come out of this fight side by side, as we went in, or go down together."

"Now, now, Count"—Mr Hicks laid a soothing hand on Cyril's arm—"we aren't going to hurl our lives away, you bet. There's no sort of sentimental self-sacrifice about me—no, sir! I have a smart piece of business on hand, and I want a young fellow of large bodily strength to help me put it through. You are just a bundle of nerves this journey, and so used up with strain and anxiety that it's only spirit

and nothing else keeps you on your horse. Mr Mansfield and I are partners in this deal, and you watch how well things will pan out when they recognise who's got 'em in charge."

Cyril laughed shamefacedly, and turned his attention to keeping his horse in hand in the headlong race which now ensued. Mr Hicks's object was to escape from the flat stretch of desert on which the enemy, with their fresher horses, might easily surround his little party, and to gain the shelter of the sandhills in front. Pausing to look back, he observed with satisfaction that the Beni Ayub, no longer massed in a compact body, were tailing off gradually, the sheikh and a few better-mounted men alone seeming to gain perceptibly on the pursued. When the sandhills were reached, he glanced back once more, and saw that the sheikh, on his magnificent horse, was now considerably in advance of his nearest followers. This was what Mr Hicks had hoped for.

"Ride on, Count! ride on, sheikh! Turn aside, Mr Mansfield, and you two, Abd-el-Kader and Nur-ed-Din. Dodge behind the sandhills, so. Have your rifles ready."

Shouting in alternate English and Arabic, and strengthening his exhortations by means of vigorous pointing and shoving, Mr Hicks marshalled his forces. He and Mansfield were stationed close to the path between the sandhills, one on each side, the two Arabs a little behind them.

"Stay where you are, Mr Mansfield; and when you see the sheikh dismounted, round up his horse. That's your business. You two men of the Beni Ismail, ride forward the moment the sheikh of your enemies has passed you and present your rifles at those who come after him. If they still ride on, fire; but don't waste your shots, and reserve the second barrel."

Having given his orders, Mr Hicks rode back a short distance from the path, and, unhooking the rope from his

saddle, arranged it on his arm. This was scarcely accomplished to his satisfaction before Mansfield's raised hand told him that the sheikh was close upon them, thundering on in hot pursuit of the party that was just disappearing round the sandhills in front. Neither Mansfield nor the Arabs could ever succeed in saying definitely what followed. That Mr Hicks rode forward across the sheikh's path, that the rope in his hand whizzed through the air, and that in an instant the sheikh was prostrate on the ground and his horse rushing wildly away—this they perceived, but had no time even to wonder how it was done, for their own duties demanded their attention. Mansfield effected the capture of the terrified horse in a brilliant and wholly original manner; for when he grabbed frantically at its bridle as it dashed towards him, and failed to seize it, he kicked his foot free of the stirrup and caught it in the loose rein, with the result that he was promptly jerked from his saddle and thrown to the ground. Recovering himself immediately, he was in time to seize the rein with his hand before the astonished horse had made up its mind what to do. His own horse, which was equally amazed and indignant, by reason of his unconventional descent, allowed itself to be caught with less difficulty, and he turned to see how the other actors in the drama were faring. The two Arabs were sitting statue-like on their horses, covering with their rifles five or six of the Beni Ayub, who, on seeing their chief fall, had halted just out of range, and were afraid to follow him further, while the sheikh himself, black in the face and half-strangled, was being bound hand and foot in a most workman-like manner by Mr Hicks.

"Well done!" cried Mansfield. "Who would ever have thought of a lasso in this part of the world?"

"Ah, I haven't gone cowboying in New Mexico for nothing," said Mr Hicks complacently. "Go ahead, you fool! The more you kick, the tighter the knots will be, you bet.

Ah, Mr Mansfield, you inclined to think I brought this lariat along to fix up my prisoners with before they were caught, but you see it has caught 'em and tied 'em both. Now I'm through, I guess I'll mount this gentleman's horse—for these Arabs are so cute that it would make nothing of carrying him right back to his friends all on its own hook, according to the Sunday-school books—and he shall have a seat on mine. But wait a minute first."

He dragged his prisoner to a spot where he was in full view of his dismayed followers, and drawing out his revolver, held it to his head.

"You see this, men of the Beni Ayub?" he cried in Arabic, accompanying the words with appropriate gestures. "Your sheikh will go with us the rest of our journey. If you attack us, the first shot we fire will settle his business, and if you even molest us, we will take him to Es Sham and deliver him to the Roumis there. Therefore beware!"

Having shouted his warning, Mr Hicks mounted the sheikh's horse, and with Mansfield's assistance bound the prisoner firmly on his own; then, with the two Arabs bringing up the rear, they rode on after the rest. Great was the joy and exultation with which the Beni Ismail beheld the unpleasant plight of their hereditary foe; but Cyril interposed to forbid any indignities being offered to the captive, who might yet serve as a useful intermediary with his tribe. The novel method of his capture had produced a strong effect upon his mind, and largely increased his respect for the Prince of the Jews, and this feeling was enhanced by the continued failure of his own tribesmen to rescue him. They followed the party at a distance, and prowled round the camp at night in the hope of taking its defenders by surprise; but Mr Hicks and Mansfield kept watch and watch all night through, and this unceasing vigilance had its reward. By dint of long marches and little rest, the desert was safely crossed in six days after leaving Sitt Zeynab,

and within three hours' ride of Damascus the cavalcade paused while Cyril gave orders for the prisoner to be unbound, and his horse and rifle restored to him.

"Return to thy tribe, O Sheikh of the Beni Ayub," he said, "and tell them of the clemency of the Prince of the Jews. I might have carried thee bound into Es Sham, and left thee to rot in a Roumi dungeon, but I send thee back to thy people, that they may know that I desire to be their friend, and that it is my will there shall be peace throughout the desert."

The bewildered sheikh listened apathetically as Mr Hicks translated the words, but when the Beni Ismail drew aside to allow him to pass, he seemed to recognise all at once that he was free, and setting spurs to his horse, darted off into the desert like the wind. As his late custodians stood watching him, he reined up when almost out of sight, and returned.

"O Prince of the Jews, the Beni Ayub are thy servants," he cried. "Never would I have laid wait for thee but for the words of the old man who came to our tents with the servant of the Consulate of Scythia, and tempted thy servant with great gifts to detain thee in the desert for a space. Now that I know thy power and thy wisdom, never again will I or the Beni Ayub raise a spear against thee or thy servants the Beni Ismail."

Dismounting, he raised the hem of Cyril's cloak to his lips, exchanged greetings with the sheikh of the Beni Ismail, and rode away again.

"All's well that ends well," said Cyril. "And now for Damascus!"

They rode on briskly, only to halt again an hour later. This time it was to bid farewell to the Beni Ismail, who in their enthusiasm for their new leader had accompanied him far beyond their usual limits, although for some time they had been looking askance at every hillock, lest it should

conceal that abomination of the desert Arab, a house. The sheikh received Cyril's messages for the Queen—including another earnest recommendation not to cross the desert until the Beni Ayub had returned to their usual haunts—his men salaamed, with frank admiration beaming in their bold eyes, and stood gazing lingeringly as Cyril and his two companions rode away. There were no more halts now, and as the cultivated land was reached, the roads became better. The unpleasant passage through the burying-ground was accomplished at a reckless pace, and a judicious *bakhshish* prevented awkward inquiries at the city gate. Riding more cautiously through the crowded streets, the three adventurers, worn out with hard travelling and want of sleep, drew rein at the door of the house which they had left just three weeks before. Paschics rushed into the courtyard to meet them, with bloodshot eyes and the dishevelled aspect of a man who has slept for several nights in his clothes, and wept tears of joy when he saw Cyril.

"Your Excellency is come. Then all is not lost!" he gasped.

"Well, what is it?" asked Cyril, dismounting.

"Oh, Excellency, it is partly my fault, and yet how could I have prevented it? It was that elderly official of the Princess of Dardania's—Colonel Czartoriski. The first two or three days after you started he was continually sending letters and desiring to see you, though I assured him you could receive no one. Then he disguised himself with a false beard and green spectacles—yes, Excellency!—and told the people of the house that he was a doctor for whom you had sent, and they showed him which were your rooms. He did not approach by the staircase, knowing that I should be on the watch, and Dietrich also, but came up the steps leading from the garden, and crept along the verandah, and so peeped in at the window of your room. Dietrich caught sight of him first, and rushed out. Hearing a scuffle, I

followed, and penetrated the man's disguise immediately. We delivered him over to the police, after handling him not too gently, but the Scythian Consul came to his assistance, and got him released at once."

"But what has all this led to?" demanded Cyril, who had been listening with what patience he might as the Thracian poured out his tale while they were crossing the courtyard.

"Why, Excellency, your enemies had learnt that you were away, and they took advantage of the news immediately. There is a recrudescence of Anti-Semitism all over Europe, especially in Neustria. The great Lutetian preacher is delivering a course of sermons against the Jews, and the 'Petite Parole' opens its columns daily to correspondents urging the most atrocious measures. All the other papers are following suit, members of the Government have denounced the Palestine scheme in the Chamber, and there are signs that the different political parties are willing to meet on the common ground of hatred of the Jews."

"Well, we know how to manage Neustria."

"But that is not the worst, Excellency. M. Lucien Salomans is dead."

"What, murdered?"

"They call it suicide. He was present at some public entertainment, at which one of the performers made a violent attack on the Jews. He remonstrated, and became involved in a heated discussion with several gentlemen near him. It is alleged that he left the hall exclaiming that, Jew though he was, it was in his power to destroy Neustria if he chose——"

"Blatant fool!" cried Cyril furiously.

"Excellency, he is dead. He was arrested that evening, and his house searched. In prison he was visited by two high officials, who spent some time in his cell. This was late at night, and in the morning he was discovered to be

dead. They say that he shot himself to avoid being surprised into disclosures, but it is whispered that one of his visitors, enraged by his persistent silence, killed him with the revolver which had been held to his head to extort a confession."

"But surely he had not had the madness—— Did things end there?"

"Oh no, Excellency. Since his death the houses of the principal Jews interested in our movement have been repeatedly subjected to sudden visits from the police."

"Good. They are baffled so far, then. And in other countries?"

"When the excitement began in Neustria, Excellency, the Continental press in general reserved judgment, as though alarmed at the temerity of the Lutetian papers. But when two or three days passed, and there was no sign from you, they grew bold, and revived all their old infamies, busying themselves also with the future of Palestine. It is now recommended everywhere that Jerusalem shall be occupied by the Powers jointly, and the Jews excluded from it. The Powers are also to have charge of all the foreign relations of the new state, the Jews regulating only such of its affairs as are purely national and domestic. The alarm in the Jewish world is very great. The Chevalier Goldberg has telegraphed again and again, asking for some assurance that you have the situation in hand. He is afraid to take any steps lest he should jeopardise some plan of yours, and I could not reassure him, for you did not contemplate such a crisis as this in your instructions."

"No, I had not foreseen this," said Cyril slowly. He had been glancing, while Paschies spoke, through the piles of letters and telegrams stacked on the table, flinging some aside and arranging others carefully in order. He had a sheaf of papers in his hand now, and was flicking them through absently.

"Sit down and write, Paschics," was the sharp order which startled the secretary. "And you, Mansfield——"

"Land alive, Count! you don't allow to fix up all the affairs of Europe before you get a bath and a sleep?" cried Mr Hicks, aghast.

"That's exactly what I have to do. You take a rest, Hicks, if you like."

"Not much," was the emphatic reply. "I won't offer to write for you, Count, since these two gentlemen know your ways better than I do. But if you have any despatches to send off I can take them to the bureau for you, and let daylight into any one that offers any objection. I can operate the instrument if it's necessary, you bet."

"A hint at the nature of the hold we have over Neustria would make the fortune of your paper if it got wind of it. But it must not, you understand? If the responsibility is too great for you, I won't burden you with it."

"I guess my conscience is asleep on the paper side just now, Count. Go ahead, and make use of me right away."

"The immediate business of the moment is to send an ultimatum to the Neustrian Minister of Foreign Affairs. Unless this persecution—moral and material—of the Jews ceases instantly, there will be presented to the United States Government a memorandum of the secret convention entered into between Scythia and Neustria with reference to the Darien Canal. When American attention is distracted, owing to troubles elsewhere, it is agreed that the two Powers shall take joint action with regard to Darien." Cyril looked sharply at Mr Hicks, who nodded calmly.

"Good card, Count. It never struck me you had that up your sleeve."

"You knew of the convention, then?"

"That is so, sir. I'm keeping it back for the next war-scare, or the next time a war-scare is needed, any way. But you can just play it for all it's worth now. You see I know

a Jew or two as well as you ; but I didn't guess that you were able to put your fingers upon the missing document."

"Salomans and I were the only men who knew where it is concealed. Now that he is dead, without revealing the secret to his brother, it will have to be got at by means of a long chain of intermediaries. Each man knows only his particular link in the chain ; but we must be ready to produce the paper at once if it is wanted."

"And you don't calculate that the Judenhetze has gone too far to be stopped?"

"Certainly not. They can stop it fast enough if they like. They will have to take strong measures—possibly illegal measures—in the name of the public safety, as they have done often enough when the result would inflict injury upon the Jews. When Neustria is settled, we shall have time to think of the rest of Europe. Ready, Paschics?"

Cyril laid down the telegrams, which he had been looking through as he spoke, and glanced, with the faintest shadow of a smile, at Mansfield, who was fast asleep, his head pillowed on his arms on the table. "Wake up, Mansfield!" a firm hand gripped his shoulder. "You can rest afterwards, but you must work now."

For several hours Paschics wrote unceasingly, Mansfield laboured at the typewriter, Mr Hicks hurried in and out with telegrams and their answers, and still Cyril sat in his place, dictating to one, giving directions to another, exchanging missives with the third. He seemed, as Mr Hicks had said, to have the affairs of all Europe in his hands. Reassuring messages went to one community of Jews, curt commands to another, stern reproofs to yet another ; while to high government officials, and personages in situations even more lofty, were despatched brief reminders of the unpleasant consequences that would follow a breach of faith with the United Nation Syndicate. From the Hercynian Chancellor to the editor of an obscure Jargon journal, no

one seemed either too high or too low for his notice, and Mr Hicks observed in admiration that he had no need to refer to any note-book for so much as a single name or address. Paschics was a pitiable object as he laboured in vain to keep up with his employer's dictation. Mansfield had fallen into a state of semi-somnambulism as he translated into suitable terms, in a purely mechanical way, the brief instructions he received. Mr Hicks himself was inclined to think that the 'Crier' office on a summer night, with a big sensation coming in just as the paper had gone to press, was not so much worse than this; but Cyril showed no sign of hurry or exhaustion as he issued his directions without a pause, and the pile of papers before him grew smaller and smaller. The stream of fresh telegrams ceased at last, for the office was closed for the night, the typewriter rested from its clicking and clacking; Paschics was engaged upon the last letter.

"Is there anything more, Excellency?" he asked, looking up, for Cyril had suddenly ceased speaking.

"I believe not. No, I cannot think of anything more. Hicks," he turned to the American, "it's a curious thing, my brain is an utter blank. If you asked me what all these letters have been about, I could not tell you. And yet my head has never been clearer than it was until just now. It is like the sudden snapping of a thread."

"You had better get to bed at once, Count," was the answer, the roughness of which masked a fierce rush of anxiety.

CHAPTER XX.

REDINTEGRATIO AMORIS.

To the surprise and delight of Mr Hicks, the attack of brain fever which he had feared for his patient did not ensue. Cyril remained for several days in a state of exhaustion amounting to stupor, in which he displayed no interest in outside affairs, and showed a curious irritability when the faithful Paschics tried to induce him to take in hand the routine work which had fallen into arrears during his absence. Of important business there was happily none to settle, for Europe was conscious that the master-hand was once more on the reins, and the anti-Semitic agitation died down as quickly as it had arisen, without making necessary any very drastic measures. Thus relieved from anxiety, Cyril turned impatiently from the records of work done, and copies of answered letters, to which Paschics tried to direct his attention.

"Let me rest, Paschics. Don't you see I am utterly worn out? Your letter-books convey no meaning whatever to my mind. If another crisis arises, you can let me know; but now I must rest."

"Nature is taking her revenge," said the doctor whom Mr Hicks had felt it his duty to call in. "His Excellency's brain has been overworked, and the cause of the strain is now regarded with loathing. The Count must take a holi-

day, and afterwards he will return to business with fresh zest. When this drowsiness passes off, get him up to Brutli or one of the other villages on Anti-Lebanon, and let him live in the open air."

"That doctor is what I call a sensible man," muttered Cyril drowsily when the prescription was repeated to him. "Let some one take rooms at Brutli, and find out whether the Queen has arrived."

In pursuance of these instructions, Mansfield rode up to the village two or three days later. The hardships of the desert journey had made no permanent impression upon him, and after a nap which lasted the better part of two days the brownness of his skin and a hollow look about his cheeks were the only signs remaining of three weeks' plain living and hard riding. He was in the best of spirits when he dismounted at the door of the inn and inquired of the landlord whether the Queen's attendants still had their quarters there. M. Stefanovics, he found, had been spending the morning at the Institution in attendance upon her Majesty, but was expected to return shortly, and General Banics was in his rooms, whither Mansfield betook himself. The General answered his inquiry for M. Stefanovics with perceptible stiffness.

"I expect my colleague to return to lunch, certainly, but I cannot answer for his movements. His attendance upon the Queen has occupied a large proportion of his time of late. Her Majesty is pleased no longer to seclude herself so completely from the world. I had the honour of attending her upon a mountain ride yesterday." At the close of this long series of brief sentences, General Banics confronted Mansfield with an expression of great severity, as though to say, "Allude to the indiscreet revelations made to you on your last visit if you dare!"

"I am glad her Majesty is so much better—in spirits, I mean," Mansfield added hastily. "Do you think there is any chance of my being permitted to see her?"

"To see the Queen? you must be mad! And why is her Majesty to receive you, pray?"

"I am the bearer of a message from Count Mortimer."

"From Count Mortimer? You did not say that when you were here last."

"It was unnecessary. You did not ask me."

Suspicion and indignation strove for the mastery in General Banics's countenance. "Excuse me, I see my colleague coming. I must meet him," he said brusquely, and hurried off to intercept M. Stefanovics on his way across the yard, and inform him of this new development of affairs. The chamberlain looked aghast.

"Did you obtain an interview with her Majesty the last time you were here, monsieur?" he demanded of Mansfield, plunging violently up the steps of the verandah as he spoke.

"No, I saw no one but a lady-in-waiting named Von Staubach."

"There!" said M. Stefanovics, obviously much relieved, to General Banics, "you see the change in her Majesty cannot be owing to——" a reproving glance cut him short, and he turned again to Mansfield. "But what is your message, monsieur? or is it private?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Count Mortimer is ordered to make a short stay at Brutli for his health, and he is anxious to know whether his presence here would be disagreeable to her Majesty."

"This is an outrage!" cried M. Stefanovics, almost dancing with rage. "Is it possible that the man can dare to force his presence again upon our august mistress, pursuing her even into the solitudes whither she has retreated to hide her sorrows? He, of all people! Such shamelessness is incredible."

"Stefanovics, you are a fool!" growled General Banics. "How can it affect her Majesty if the Count comes here? His movements have no interest for her. His sending this

message is a piece of impertinence. If you attribute any importance to it, you encourage the man in his presumption."

"Settle it between yourselves, gentlemen," said Mansfield mildly. "I am fortunate in having her Majesty as the final court of appeal."

M. Stefanovics dragged the General aside, and they talked rapidly and emphatically for some minutes, such sentences reaching Mansfield as, "Can he have written already?" "He is aiming at re-establishing his old ascendancy." "He thinks that by coming here ill he will move her pity."

"Monsieur," said M. Stefanovics, returning, and addressing Mansfield with a judicial air, "we wish to know whether your master has any ulterior object in this extraordinary proceeding?"

"Really," replied Mansfield, with extreme innocence, "I can't say."

"But does he entertain any hopes—any designs——"

"If you will be so good as to ask me a plain question, monsieur, I will try to give you a plain answer."

"Then is he hoping to resume his old position with her Majesty?"

"May I ask what that was?"

"He was privately betrothed to her."

"If it was private, how is it that you know anything about it?"

Confusion kept M. Stefanovics silent for a moment. "Madame Stefanovics was in the secret," he said at last, "and when the affair terminated, she revealed the whole thing to me, in her indignation against Count Mortimer."

"You and your wife are a pair of chatterboxes!" cried General Banics suddenly, in a fury of indignation. "No secrets are safe with you."

"Thank you, General," said Mansfield warmly; "I accept the reproof. Count Mortimer's secrets are safe with me. Not even to you will I reveal them."

M. Stefanovics had been speechless and almost black in the face with rage, but his delight on hearing his colleague thus hoist with his own petard relieved his mind, and he broke into a shout of laughter.

"Aha, General, the Englishman is too clever for us! Come, monsieur, what is it you ask?"

"All I want you to do is to let me wait in the anteroom while you carry the message to the Queen, so that I may be at hand if her Majesty is pleased to wish to ask me anything."

"Excellent!" said M. Stefanovics, his good-humour quite restored. "Your demands are commendably moderate, monsieur. You will join us at lunch first?"

The meal passed off peacefully, although General Banics preserved a persistent silence and an expression of cold contempt towards both Mansfield and M. Stefanovics, and when it became his duty to conduct the uninvited guest to the Institution in the afternoon, he relieved the monotony of the climb by a single remark only.

"Understand, monsieur," he burst out, standing still in the middle of the pathway, and glaring down at Mansfield, who was following him, "if your master succeeds in adding so much as a finger's weight to her Majesty's sorrows, I will kill him in her very presence!"

"There would be two people to reckon with in such a case, General—her Majesty and Count Mortimer himself," said Mansfield, with great calmness. "It will be time enough, surely, to avenge the Queen when she asks for your help?"

The cool reasonableness of this speech stung the General to the quick, and uttering an inarticulate grunt, he turned to resume the march up the hill. Arrived at the Institution, he left Mansfield in the deaconesses' guest-chamber, while he went to inquire the Queen's pleasure, returning shortly, with a very bad grace, to say that her Majesty desired his attendance. The Queen was sitting in a marble verandah, which

looked upon a small enclosed garden, warm and bright in spite of the advanced season of the year, and musical with fountains. Madame Stefanovics, a lady almost as stout and comfortable-looking as her husband, was with her, but when General Banics had presented Mansfield and retired to the door, she also retreated out of earshot, and Ernestine gave her visitor a significant smile.

"We must not shock Banics," she said. "He does not know that I have ever seen you before. But tell me, is the Count's illness serious?" her voice shook with anxiety.

"Oh no, madame. It is merely over-fatigue from the journey."

"Ah, the sheikh told me of your wonderful adventures. But I was terrified when Banics said he was ill. You see, in his case I cannot be sure whether his illnesses are merely—political, or whether he is making light of a serious malady for reasons of state."

"Indeed, madame, this attack is genuine, but only temporary, I am sure."

The confident assurance brought the smile again to the Queen's face. "He must recover quickly, for I am all impatience to see him. There is so much to be arranged, you know. Only the ladies are in the secret, and I have left Anna Mirkovics to act as my deputy at Sitt Zeynab. Banics and Stefanovics must hear of the betrothal before it is announced to the world. They have been so faithful to me. You will tell the Count this?"

"Certainly, madame. Does your Majesty wish to send him any other message?"

"Tell him"—she paused, and the smile grew dazzling—"give him all the messages you would wish to receive were you in his place. You understand?"

She held out her hand, and Mansfield kissed it and retired in a state of ecstatic confusion. Philippa was Philippa still, and there was no one like her in all the world, but here was a

woman in whose cause a man might joyfully die, and dying, ask no reward but a glance from her eyes. Once Mansfield had wondered at Cyril's renewed devotion to the Queen, which seemed so foreign to his character, and was kept in such strict subjection by his own will, but since he had seen her he had ceased to wonder. No man who had once succumbed to her charm of manner, however valiantly he might struggle against it, could ever escape from his bondage to those smiles. Mansfield felt no surprise at the fierceness with which General Banics was prepared to defend his mistress. It was only natural. In the General's circumstances, Mansfield would have been impelled to do the same himself.

Two days later, Cyril, with his train of attendants, was established in the village inn, to the huge delight of the landlord, whose self-satisfaction made itself felt even in Damascus, leading, as it did, to visions of a huge hotel, to be built *alla Franca* on the site of the present modest edifice, and to become renowned throughout the Levant as a sanatorium. On the evening of Cyril's arrival, General Banics, with fierce disinclination bristling in every hair of his moustache, took his way across the courtyard in uniform to inquire after his health, and to intimate that her Majesty had been pleased to consent to receive him the next day. The reception was a very formal, full-dress affair, designed for the sole benefit of the Thracian officials and Fräulein von Staubach, who had been excluded from the secret of the desert reconciliation owing to a well-grounded distrust of her discretion. Still, since she believed firmly that the Queen had returned to ordinary life solely on account of her letter, despatched after Mansfield's first visit to Brutli, she was not without her compensations. Everything was done with great ceremony, and the deaconesses and their Syrian flock were duly impressed, while Cyril was so much exhausted that he could scarcely

mount his horse to ride back to the inn. The suggestion of the formal audience had been his own, however, and his return was followed by a message brought by M. Stefanovics, to the effect that her Majesty had been grieved to see how ill Count Mortimer was looking, and that she hoped he would avail himself of her pleasant sheltered garden whenever he felt well enough to be out of doors. It was not to be expected that his presence should exclude the Queen from her own domain, or that their meeting there should be marked by the formality of the state reception, and towards the end of the first afternoon Fräulein von Staubach, who had been in attendance, crept noiselessly into the house, and ran to the room where Baroness von Hilfenstein and Madame Stefanovics were sitting.

"It is all settled! They are reconciled, the betrothal is renewed!" she cried rapturously. "I saw them exchange flowers—roses and sprays of myrtle. Oh, I was sure it would come right! I just slipped in to tell you. I could not wait."

"But how can you be certain?" asked Madame Stefanovics cautiously.

"Certain! I shall ask her Majesty," was the reply, as Fräulein von Staubach slipped back to her post. It was with the freedom of a privileged confidant that she attacked the Queen that evening.

"Dearest madame, may we not be allowed to congratulate you? Is not something going to happen that will make us all very happy? You know that your happiness is ours."

"Is that so, Sophie? Then you must be very happy at this moment."

"Indeed I am, madame. May I make the rest happy too?"

"No; I will tell Banics and Stefanovics myself," said the Queen, and she did so the next morning. Whatever their secret thoughts were upon the matter, they appreciated their

mistress's consideration in communicating the news personally, and crushed down their feelings nobly when they congratulated Cyril. There was to be no secrecy this time about the betrothal. If Cyril had desired any delay in the announcement, he could not have asked it, with the memory of that twelve years' engagement, which Ernestine had accepted with such unwillingness, and which had ended so sadly, fresh in his mind. They exchanged rings, therefore, in German fashion, and after taking this decisive step, notified their respective relations of the understanding to which they had come.

In the meantime, the news filtered down into the village through the gossip of the servants, and quickly reached Colonel Czartoriski at Damascus by the agency of one of the men employed at the inn, with whom he had bargained to keep him informed of all that went on. Unfortunately, however, the announcement that the Queen had begun to appear in public and to receive visitors only arrived at the same time; so that he found it was too late to carry out his orders and anticipate a reconciliation. In this dilemma he telegraphed to the Princess of Dardania for instructions, receiving the prompt reply, "Deliver my letter to her immediately," and this he proceeded at once to do. It was with the utmost reluctance that Ernestine consented to receive him. The shrinking dread of her cousin, with which the sufferings endured at her hands had filled her, made her feel instinctively that the request boded ill to her new happiness, and she was only partially reassured by the reminder from her ladies that Colonel Czartoriski had been entreating an opportunity of delivering his mistress's letter for months past, so that it could not possibly be concerned with the engagement. She received the visitor with the utmost formality, accepted at his hands the packet with which he was charged, made and answered the customary polite inquiries, and dismissed him, graciously but with marked coldness.

She was not by nature a vindictive woman, but the injuries which the Princess of Dardania had done her were such as she could never forgive.

A few minutes later, Cyril, lounging idly on the grass beside one of the fountains in the garden, was disturbed by Fräulein von Staubach, who told him that the Queen wished to speak to him, adding the gratuitous information that her Majesty was very much troubled about something. He found Ernestine, as usual, in the marble verandah which served her as a presence-chamber. She had an open letter before her, and her face was very pale as she looked up at him.

"Cyril," she said fearfully, "this comes from my cousin Ottilie."

"Now for it!" was Cyril's inward comment, as he braced himself to meet the blow, the imminence of which had been little present to his mind of late. "I hope it hasn't brought you any bad news?" he added, with a coolness which he was far from feeling, but which tended to reassure the Queen.

"I have only looked at the first page," she said; "but I can see that it is an attack upon you. She says that you have injured her deeply—that you belong to her, and not to me. Cyril, I must know, I must be sure! Do you love her? have you ever loved her?"

"I have never loved her, and I don't now."

"You have never asked her to marry you?"

"Never."

"Then that is all I want to know." She sprang up, and lifting the perforated cover from the *mangal*, or brazier, which stood close to the divan, threw the letter upon the glowing charcoal. "I won't read any more. I am not interested in what she says against you. If you had really belonged to her, I would have given you up, though it would have broken my heart; but I can trust you, Cyril, and I do. You may have injured her, as she says—I know

"I am shut out of your political schemes," she smiled sadly, "and I don't ask how or why it was—but it was not in that way."

"My dearest, I wish I was more worthy of your trust."

"Trust me, my beloved; I shall always trust you."

The subject of the unread letter was not again touched upon between them, but Ernestine did not forget it. She had a conviction that Colonel Czartoriski would linger in the neighbourhood in order to watch the effect of his embassy, and inform his mistress of the result. That very evening she caught a glimpse of him, half-concealed among the trees by the wayside, watching her as she rode. This was merely what she had expected, and she had prepared a disappointment for him. Turning and beckoning with smiling imperiousness to Cyril, who was close behind, she reined in her horse that he might ride beside her. As they rode, she engaged him in a low-toned confidential conversation, quite contrary to her wont in public, stretching out a hand the while to play with his horse's mane. A second glance showed her presently that Colonel Czartoriski had seen enough, and was retreating down the road, with defeat in all his aspect, and she shook her riding-whip at his unconscious form.

"Go and tell your mistress exactly what you saw!" she cried passionately, and laughed at the sudden dawn of comprehension in Cyril's face.

Baffled in his quest, Colonel Czartoriski left Brutli, acting upon instructions from the Princess of Dardania, and a few days of intense quiet and happiness succeeded his departure. The unfeigned joy felt by all the attendants of the betrothed pair in their reconciliation was reflected in the faces of the deaconesses and their Syrian peasants, and smiling looks and gifts of flowers or fruit greeted both Cyril and Ernestine everywhere. Even the melancholy Paschics went about with a beaming countenance and a flower in his buttonhole, and

Mr Hicks's characteristic pessimism displayed itself only in a remark aside to Mansfield, to the effect that this was the calm before the storm. What he wanted to know was, what would all those European kings think about it?

It happened that the Chevalier Goldberg was at the Schloss at Vindobona, closeted with the Emperor on a matter of high financial importance, when the Queen's letter to her Pannonian kinsfolk arrived. The Chevalier had received the news of the engagement by telegram some days before, and therefore his presence at the palace on this particular morning may or may not have been accidental.

"Well, Goldberg, so our friend Mortimer is to marry Queen Ernestine?" said the Emperor, returning to the room after being summoned away by a message from the Empress.

"So I have heard, sir."

"Well, no one is likely to offer any real objection. The Emperor Sigismund will dislike the idea, no doubt, but he has no means of coercing the Queen, and her son's past treatment of her debars him from putting in a claim to interfere. But it is a preposterous affair, for Mortimer is little better than a beggar. I thought, Goldberg, that you financiers always made a point of paying your instruments well, that they might do you credit?"

"I have sometimes thought, sir, that your Majesty, and I, and the Syndicate I represent, and various other important people, are only the instruments—the pawns, if you will—of this little Englishman, who plays because it interests him to move the pieces."

The Emperor smiled. "We shall have to do something for him, I suppose," he said. "Is there anything that strikes you as particularly suitable?"

"Ah, sir, your Majesty knows that there is one post for which Count Mortimer is supremely fitted. His appointment to it would be welcomed with acclamation by the Jews all over the world."

"You are sure of that? Well, I will set on foot negotiations. I am uneasy—in common with the whole Catholic world—about those fortified convents which Scythia has for years been so busy erecting on every point of vantage round Jerusalem. At the present moment I think we should be able to make her see reason; but when this famine is over——! But the Jews must be unanimous, Chevalier. That is indispensable."

"I cannot conceive that any opposition could arise, sir."

"Tell me, Goldberg, is Mortimer marrying the Queen in order to become Prince of Palestine, or seeking to become Prince of Palestine that he may marry the Queen?"

"I cannot say, sir. I can only surmise that it will be the proudest moment of his life when he can lay his coronet at her Majesty's feet."

"You are diplomatic. After all, his motives do not concern us."

"May I entreat a favour of your Majesty? My friend has done me the honour to invite me to assist at his wedding, and if I might be permitted to inform him of the gracious intentions with which——"

"You may intimate in private the probable course of events, but not publicly. When is the wedding? Not settled? Oh, you need not try to deceive me for politeness' sake, Chevalier. It is better that I should not know until it is all over. Make it a *chose jugée*; there is no going behind that, you know. The sooner the better."

The day after this interview had taken place at Vindobona, a letter from Cyril reached Llandiarmid, communicating the great news to Lord Caerleon, and containing a proposal which excited the younger members of the family almost to the verge of lunacy.

"I want you to do something for me, Caerleon. Will you bring Nadia and the young ones to Damascus for the wedding? I need not tell you what a pleasure your presence

would be to me, and Ernestine would appreciate the kindness deeply, especially as none of her own family are likely to be here. You need give yourselves no trouble. Goldberg has taken Ormsea's yacht, the *White Lady*, for a year or two, and will pick you up at Brindisi and bring you straight to Beyrout. He is charged also with the duty of securing the parson, for there does not happen to be an English clergyman here at this moment, and we have decided that it would be unfair to ask any of the German missionaries to officiate, since they stand in such abject terror of the Emperor Sigismund. I have made up my mind you will all come. Bring Wright with you, if you can tear the old fellow away from domestic joys. It will be something for him to remember all the rest of his life. It is just possible that there may be some further sights and ceremonies that will interest you after the wedding; but I don't want to estimate prematurely the yield of the international incubator. Telegraph to Goldberg at Venice if you can come, and entreat Nadia—for Ernestine's sake, for my sake, for any sake—to leave her Needlework Guild and Nursing Association and Society for Making People Virtuous by Act of Parliament to take care of themselves for a month or so, and to give the bride the support of her presence. I know you'll come, old man."

"*Oh*, father!" burst from Philippa, as her father finished reading the letter aloud. "Oh, mother!"

"You feel that we ought to go, Carlino?" said Lady Caerleon.

"Now, how did you know that? Well, yes, I do."

"Of course," said Philippa; "and Usk's vacation begins to-morrow. He can meet us in London as we pass through. It all fits in beautifully. To see Uncle Cyril married, and to a Queen! It's like a book—like an old romance. Don't you feel as if you were a Crusader, father? To go to Palestine, and all this as well!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW FACTOR.

"THE gracious gentleman will pardon me, but—he has the appearance of a divine of the English Church?"

The young clergyman who was standing watching the pigeons in the Piazza San Marco turned and looked curiously at the deferential Jew who had addressed him in English. "Certainly, I am a clergyman of the Church of England," he said.

"Will the gracious divine do me the favour to accompany me on board the yacht *White Lady*, which is lying in the lagoon? There is one of his compatriots who stands in urgent need of his ghostly services."

"The *White Lady*? That's Lord Ormsea's yacht, isn't it? I'm afraid Lord Ormsea would not consider me very sound, from his point of view, but if he told you to fetch any clergyman you met, no doubt the case is urgent. Yes, of course I'll come. What is the matter with the sick person?"

"I was not told, gracious sir. If the venerable divine will give himself the trouble to step this way, I have a gondola waiting."

There was the usual mass of tourists and idlers thronging the Piazzetta as the clergyman followed his guide through it, and he did not observe that the Jew exchanged signals with a co-religionist in the crowd, who disappeared immediately. Ill

informed as the messenger seemed to be as to the cause of his embassy, he was an eminently conversational person. The sight of the *Giudecca*, as they passed it, set flowing such a stream of historical reminiscence that the clergyman listened in fascinated silence, and scarcely noticed the length of the journey, or the fact that the yacht was lying close to the *Porto di Lido*, in readiness to proceed to sea. It struck him, however, as strange that the sailors who were at hand to help him up the side made no reference to the invalid for whose benefit he had been summoned on board, and that the Jew hurried him across the deck before he could reply to the captain's civil words of welcome. Understanding that the owner was in the saloon, he followed his guide below, and found himself in the presence, not of that militant Neo-Anglican, Lord Ormsea, but of a stout, bearded gentleman of unmistakably Hebraic appearance.

"De Referend Alexander Chudson, I think?" said the stranger, coming forward with outstretched hand. "My dear sir, I am unspeakably grateful to you for hurryink so promptly to de assistance off my poor frient."

"I beg your pardon, I understood I was coming on board Lord Ormsea's yacht?" said Mr Judson diffidently. His host laughed.

"Oh, den you hef not heard det I hef hired de White Lady for three years? I shell take her to Cowes next summer. Permit me to introdooce myself—de Chefalier Goldberg, off de house off Goldberg Frères, Findobona and Lutetia."

Mr Judson bowed and murmured politely. "Will you kindly let me see the sick person at once?" he added. "I never like losing a moment in these cases."

The Chevalier waved his hands. "Pressently, pressently, my dear sir. But what did you say—de sick person? Dere iss no one sick."

"Surely I haven't come to the wrong ship, have I? I

understood from the messenger that there was an Englishman on board dangerously ill—and he brought me here.”

“Oh, dere iss some mistake! Did det fool employ dose words?”

“Well, now that I remember, he did not exactly. He said that the man needed my ghostly services, I believe.”

“Ah, det explains de metter!” cried the Chevalier, laughing joyously. “It iss to merry de Englishman, not to bury him, det you are wanted, my dear sir.”

“But that’s impossible!” cried the clergyman, starting back. “The marriage would not be legal.”

The Chevalier’s countenance exhibited every sign of the deepest dejection. “But dis iss a blow!” he cried. “What iss de law, referend sir?”

Mr Judson’s own mind was not quite clear about the matter, but he did his best to give reasons for his very definite impression that the celebration of the marriage of a British subject in foreign parts, without the presence of one of Her Majesty’s representatives, would render all concerned in it liable to divers pains and penalties. The Chevalier heard him to the end with great politeness, putting questions now and then which led the conversation into pleasant little legal byways, and finally observed complacently—

“But dis will be all right, you see, for de merrich iss to take place at Damascus, and de British Consul will be dere.”

“Damascus! But you said it was to be on board. What!—why—we are moving!”

“We hef been mofink some time, my dear sir. You are on your way to Syria, where de bride and bridegroom are waitink.”

“But this is intolerable, sir! This is kidnapping!”

“It shell be my endeafour to make it fery tolerable to you, my dear sir—an agreeable extension off your holiday, det iss all.”

"But I must go back to my work. I am expected."

"Now, come," the Chevalier laid a paternal hand on Mr Judson's coat-sleeve, "be reassonable, my dear sir. Your luggich iss all brought on board. My achent hess telegraphed to your rector det you are summoned suddenly to Pelestine. Your bill at de hotel iss paid, de proprietor iss told det you are unexpectedly called away. Eferythink iss complete, no mystery, no trouble."

"Really, I think you are the coolest hand I ever met."

"You compliment me too much. See, you receife your pessich out and home again, and fife hundret pounds for your *douceur*—your fee. You gif your rector ten pounds for his fafavourite Society—it iss for de confersion off de Chews, iss it not?—and you go beck and tell him more about de Chews den he efer knew before."

There was a malicious twinkle in the curate's eye. "Now, how in the world did you guess that we were interested in the Jews at our place?"

"You hef been seen wanderink about de Giudecca, you hef spoken to many Chews in oder parts off Fenice, and asked dem questions about deir faith."

"That's true. I have made many inquiries of them, and for a very good reason. You will be interested to know that I am the son of Salathiel Yehudi, the converted Jew, who has spent the greater part of his life at Baghdad, as a missionary to his own people."

An instantaneous change swept over the Chevalier's smiling face. "Det apostate!" he cried, then took refuge in Hebrew, "that vile serpent! that betrayer of Israel! and I have welcomed his son on board my ship!"

"You will allow me to remind you that I had no desire to come on board your ship, and that I am quite ready to leave it."

"Pardon me. You understend Hebrew? I should not hef thought——"

"My father has brought us all up to claim our share in the privileges of our race. We are proud of being Israelites, I assure you. But," as the Chevalier shuddered involuntarily, "perhaps you will now be kind enough to put me on shore?"

"My dear sir, what iss det you say? put you on shore? No, no, you are needed. You hef studied de phenomena off de pressent Return? You hef heard off Count Mortimer? He it iss det dessires your serfices. He iss to merry de moder off de King of Thracia, and dere are reassons off state why it should be done quietly."

"But, my good sir, why go about it in this theatrical fashion? If I chose to make a fuss, I could set Europe ringing with your extraordinary proceedings."

"Ah, you do not know: I hef tried. I meet an English clerchyman, an old acquaintance, at Fenice: I engache him to sail wid me and perform dis merrich, gifink him no names. He agrees. What should suddenly possess him to write to his wife and tell her about de mysterious business, so det de lady telegrephs beck 'Must be somethink wronk. Inform de police and return home.' My dear sir, det referend men left Fenice at once, and telegraphed to me from de frontier to say det he was gone. He also informed de police of de metter, and dey suspect me of intendink to kidnep an heiress—me! Dey would hef detained de yacht, I believe, if I hed stayed here lonker. Det iss why I kidnep you."

"But really, you know—How am I to be sure that it's all right?"

"My dear sir, you shell hef a prifate interfiew wid de bridegroom before de ceremony—wid de Queen also, if she will consent to receife you. But I am forgettink. De Count's broder, de Marquis off Caerleon, iss comink on board at Brindisi wid his femily, to assist et de weddink. If you are not setisfied when you hef seen dem, you shell leafe de ship at once. Now are you confinned off my *bona fides*?"

"Quite," said the clergyman politely. He did not mention that during his theological course at Latimer Hall, he had met Lord Usk two or three times on Sunday evenings at the Principal's, but the recollection afforded him a distinct gratification. If his host had provided another trap for him, he had at any rate the means of turning the tables.

But it was undoubtedly the genuine Usk who came on board at Brindisi with his parents and sister, and showed himself as delighted to meet a fellow-Man (in the Cambridge sense) as Mr Judson was to see him. Thus reassured, the curate was quite satisfied to fall in with the arrangement so unceremoniously made for him. The Chevalier treated his guests with princely hospitality, and the voyage was pleasant and uneventful. The only cloud on the horizon appeared at Larnaka, where the Chevalier found waiting for him at his agent's some news that perturbed him considerably. He discussed it at length with his secretary and two or three of the chief Jews of the place, then sent off several long telegrams to Damascus, and returned to his guests with his usual cheerfulness restored.

"I hef put it all in your broder's hends, my lord," he said gleefully to Lord Caerleon, who expressed a hope that he had not received bad news. "I hef thrown it upon his shoulders, and I feel safe. He will not fail me."

The Chevalier's telegrams were opened by Paschics, who rode into Damascus daily in order to keep the office-work from falling into arrears, and now returned immediately to Brutli with a peremptory demand for Count Mortimer's presence in the city, since a fresh crisis had arisen with which he alone could deal. Cyril's disinclination for work was as marked as it had been when his illness began, but he allowed himself to be dragged from his pleasant lotos-eating existence by the ruthless Paschics, and swept with his whole train down to Damascus. The imperious summons was all

the more distasteful, since Ernestine was intending to leave Brutli for the city the next day. The house, which had been placed at her disposal by a wealthy German merchant who had married a former deaconess, would not be ready to receive her until the time originally fixed, so that she would be deprived of Cyril's escort on the journey. Paschics saw, or thought he saw, that he had incurred his leader's deep displeasure by his persistence in demanding his return, and as soon as the cavalcade was out of sight of the Institution, he pressed forward to Cyril's side.

"Indeed, Excellency, it is absolutely necessary. There is——"

"Oh, don't din the whole thing into me just now, Paschics. When we get to Damascus will be time enough. I can't think when I am riding."

Paschics fell back to his former station, trying to remember whether he had ever heard his employer object hitherto to thinking in any circumstances. He himself was thoroughly alarmed by the crisis, and he half feared that Cyril failed to realise its seriousness. As soon as they reached the house he hurried him into the room where they had been accustomed to work; and while Mr Hicks sat down to examine a series of urgent telegrams which had arrived for him, and Mansfield uncovered the typewriter in readiness to begin operations, he summarised as tersely as possible the state of affairs described by the Chevalier's correspondents.

Ten days before, the readers of all the more important papers throughout Europe had found themselves confronted by an advertisement bidding them to "Look out for the Yellow Pamphlet!" The advertisement appeared each succeeding day in a different position and in different type, and a week after its first insertion the Yellow Pamphlet burst upon the world. The newsvendors were laden with it, the bookstalls groaned under it, and it was sent gratuitously to vast numbers of prominent people everywhere, especially

among the Jews. Printed in English, French, German, and Jargon, it made its appearance simultaneously all over Europe, Egypt, and Algeria; and it was a significant fact that the Anti-Semitic papers, together with a good many journals which were not supposed to share their views, devoted a large portion of their issue on the day of its publication to quoting from its contents and drawing inferences from them. Enormous as the cost of production must have been, the *brochure* had sold, said the telegrams, in such numbers that it was probable it would bring an appreciable profit to its proprietor. Its title was "The Syndicate and its Hero," and it was addressed to all honest men. With an affectation of judicial impartiality which rendered its statements all the more damaging, it set out to prove that the United Nation Syndicate, despite its professedly philanthropic object, was in reality nothing less than a scheme for rendering the Jews absolutely masters of the world. The steps by which, under Cyril's leadership, the Syndicate had coerced one government after another, until it had borne down all opposition to its Palestine scheme, were traced with as much minuteness as was requisite to vouch for the writer's knowledge of his subject. Then came the application. Practice had made perfect, and there was no room for doubt that the machinery, tested by means of these various trial trips, as they might be called, would quickly be used for larger ends. The world lay helpless at the feet of the Jew, but—it was for the Jew to consider whether this triumph was not likely to be too dearly bought.

Having exposed the real nature of the aims of the Syndicate, the pamphlet proceeded to deal with its hero—Cyril. Between Count Mortimer and the Jews there existed an unholy alliance, by virtue of which he was to be raised to a position commensurate with his ambitious designs, in return for his betrayal of Christendom. His first attempt

to make himself Prince of Palestine had been balked by the address of the lady to whom he had confided his schemes, and the sturdy honesty of Dr Texelius; but he had found a more adaptable tool. Another lady, whose former history was not unconnected with his own, and who, on his fall, had quitted society in a fit of pique at her loss of political power, was willing to return to it in any capacity that might offer her a scope for a fancied talent of intrigue. Thus worthily supported, Count Mortimer had proceeded, in the most barefaced manner, to force himself upon the world as the only possible ruler of Palestine, as a conjurer forces a particular card upon his audience. He had openly assumed the title of Prince of the Jews, and in that name had traversed Palestine and the surrounding countries from end to end, making treaties on his own authority, and organising a *plébiscite* which was designed to give his usurpation the semblance of legality. This desirable end effected, he would continue to play into the hands of the Syndicate, with the added prestige of place and power to assist him, while they would maintain and strengthen his position by virtue of their command of the world's finance. The position would be a proud one for him, no doubt; but was it worth while for the Jews to drive Europe to desperation, and bring upon themselves universal hatred, which was only too likely to lead to universal reprisals, merely in order to provide a throne for Count Mortimer?

Thus far the Yellow Pamphlet. The telegrams added that on the afternoon of the day of publication representatives of the press had interviewed a number of the prominent personages in various countries to whom it had been sent. On the subject of the revelations contained in it, the utmost horror and detestation was expressed by one and all of those appealed to. Everywhere the timid, cowering before the prospect of popular fury, sought to save themselves by sacri-

ficing some one else, and the bold rejoiced cynically in the chance of ridding themselves of a severe master. The scape-goat was the same in both cases. All the Hebrews who conceived themselves to have any grudge against Cyril—Texelius, the theoretical republican Rubenssohn, the English Jews, the schemers he had disappointed at Jerusalem and Alexandria—displayed the most engaging ignorance of any political designs on the part of their nation. It had never entered their minds that the Syndicate could have any but a purely philanthropic object; but if they had been misled, let it be summarily crushed as soon as its work in acquiring Palestine was done. In any case it was clear that Count Mortimer must be thrown overboard. He had traded upon the guileless simplicity of the Hebrew community in order to secure his own advancement, and corrupted the innocence of its keenest minds. There would be justice as well as policy in flinging him to the wolves that were clamouring for Jewish blood.

This prompt repudiation of Cyril and all his ways had proved so convincing to the general public that the mob which had set out to wreck the Jewish houses remained to acclaim their owners, and Semite and Anti-Semite were exchanging pledges of eternal friendship all over Europe. Before the joint influence of fear and interest, the United Nation collapsed like a house of cards. The kings of finance, who had no sentimental care for Palestine—Paris, rather than Jerusalem, flaunting herself as the Holy City of their gilded dreams—had at first yielded unwillingly to the Chevalier's enthusiasm, backed up by the monetary pressure he had contrived to exert, and now welcomed the opportunity of throwing off the yoke. The orthodox Rabbis, who, with a few exceptions, had used all their influence in opposition to the Zionist movement, and had viewed its progress with fear and aversion, as likely to transfer their power to the hands of the free-thinking Jews and such enthusiasts as Rabbi

Schaul, gloried openly in the *exposé*. The rank and file of the Children of Zion alone remained faithful. Thus the Jewish world was split in two, and the unanimity demanded by the Emperor of Pannonia was absolutely unattainable.

Paschics laid down the last telegram, and looked expectantly at his employer.

"This is the sort of thing that only a woman would do, and there is only one woman who could have done it," said Cyril. He was playing idly with a paper-knife as he sat at the table.

"But what is to be done, Excellency?" demanded Paschics, with anxious eagerness. Cyril buried his face in his hands without replying, and sat silent for some time. When he raised his head his face was haggard.

"Leave it for a while," he said. "Mansfield, get out the chessboard, and we will have a game."

The others stared at him in bewilderment, but Mansfield obeyed. It had become rather unusual for them to play, since Cyril invariably won, which deprived the contests of all their interest. This time, however, Mansfield won easily. To his astonishment he saw great drops standing on his employer's brow when he looked up.

"Another!" said Cyril hoarsely.

Mansfield set the board afresh, and perceiving from his antagonist's keen anxiety that he attached some special importance to this particular game, determined to play so carelessly as to make it impossible for him not to win. Perhaps he was in the mood to regard a victory here as a good omen for his success with regard to the larger issues at stake. But Cyril saw the intention, and dashed his fist down on the board.

"For heaven's sake, Mansfield, don't humour me as if I was a child! I haven't come to that yet. Play your hardest."

Rearranging the pieces, Mansfield obeyed, and won the game with ludicrous ease, not daring to glance at his opponent's face. Cyril sat for a moment playing with the pieces, then pushed his chair back and stood up.

"I believe my brain's gone," he said unsteadily. "I can think of nothing. The game is up, Paschics. It must all go."

"Land's sake, Count!" cried Mr Hicks, "bluff it out. You'll be all right in a day or two. Bluff will carry you through yet."

"It may, but I feel pretty certain it won't. No, Hicks, I'm cornered. Do your best with it, Paschics. Oh, to be for one hour—for ten minutes—the man I was a month ago! But that's all over now."

"Say, Count, you're sick yet," Mr Hicks cried after him as he went out. "You bet you'll be as spry as ever some time soon. Mr Mansfield," he added hastily, "if I were you I guess I'd give Dietrich the word to keep an eye on his master, and not leave any shooting-irons lying around."

Mansfield rushed out with frantic haste, and Mr Hicks and the horrified Paschics put their heads together and drew up a document which might help to postpone the need of an explanation for a day or two. Count Mortimer was still suffering from the effects of the dastardly attack made upon him at Jericho, but he left his character and his cause confidently in the hands of Europe, in the full assurance that, until he was able to vindicate them himself, judgment would be suspended. When this had been despatched, there was no more that they could do. If Cyril did not regain his former powers of mind, all, as he had said, was lost.

He returned to the room after about an hour of restless pacing up and down upon the house-top, with Mansfield, who fondly believed himself unseen, dogging him from behind the trellis the whole time. He seemed to have shaken off for the

present the horror which had seized him in its grip, and apologised for his agitation, after approving the steps which Paschics had taken.

"I must see a specialist," he added carelessly, "and no doubt he will be able to put me right. Not a word of this, please, especially to the Queen. And, Mansfield, you will be interested to know that I don't intend to commit suicide just at present, so that you need not devote your leisure hours to keeping me in view."

"Ernestine, are you on good terms with your cousin Prince Ramon of Arragon?"

"He and his wife called upon me this afternoon—before we were at all settled, indeed. I think they mean to be friendly. But were you thinking of inviting them to the—the wedding, Cyril?"

"Not for a moment. I was wondering whether Prince Ramon would object to my consulting him professionally?"

Don Ramon of Arragon was the representative of one of those junior branches of the Pannonian Imperial house which have been deprived of political power by the changes of the nineteenth century. Far from murmuring over his loss of sovereignty, he had accepted the inevitable with marked satisfaction, and devoted himself to the study of medicine, giving his services freely to all who chose to consult him. He was now well known as a specialist in diseases of the brain, and rumour said that even his pious intention in visiting Palestine was not unmixed with the desire of investigating certain forms of madness supposed to be peculiar to the East.

"Oh, I'm sure he would not mind," said the Queen eagerly. "But, Cyril, you said you were so much better."

"My head doesn't feel quite as clear as it ought, that's all."

"You are sure it is nothing worse—quite sure? What a

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comfort it is that the Ramons should be here just now! We are not to expect their sympathy or countenance for our betrothal, I could see that; but I think Ramon will be quite ready to meet you privately, in any case. Cyril, do you mind my asking whether you are going to this entertainment of the consuls' to-morrow night?"

"I was not intending to go, but I will, if you wish."

"No, I don't. I could not bear to see Ramon put before you. Oh, my beloved, you don't know how I long to see you really Prince of Palestine, unquestionably first on your own soil. I feel quite wicked on state occasions. I want to go down and take your hand and lead you up beside me, and say to every one, 'Yes, he is your king, and mine too. Don't dare to offer me any honours that you would refuse to him!'"

"My dear child, actually tears! If you only knew how little I care for all that sort of thing."

"But I care. I want every one to recognise, as I do, how great you are. It hurts me when they show me all kinds of honour because I happen to wear a crown, and leave you in the background, when every man there ought to be on his knees before you. You pretend not to feel it, for my sake, but I know you do. It makes me tingle with shame. When we are married, I shall be only your wife and nothing else, and no one shall put me before you."

"Then I hope for both our sakes that the Emperor Sigismund will not pay another visit to Palestine—during our reign, at any rate." Cyril smiled rather unsteadily.

"As if I cared for him, or anything he could say! Cyril, I want you to bring your brother and his family to dine with me to-night, if they arrive in time. Your relations are to be mine, and I want to know them all—the little girl whom Michael loves, and the rest as well. It shall be purely a family party. I remember your sister-in-law, she had such a beautiful face, and your brother looked so thor-

oughly English—so reliable. Do you think they will be willing to love me?”

“Madame, it doesn’t become your Majesty to fish for compliments. Your commands shall be obeyed,” and Cyril bowed himself out of her presence backwards in the orthodox manner.

Whether the Queen’s anxiety was real or not, it proved to be wholly unnecessary. Her guests that evening took her to their hearts with one accord. She was so beautiful, so gracious, so devoted to Cyril, that, to use their own expression, Usk and Philippa “simply grovelled” at her feet from the first moment they saw her. It was no more possible that she had ill-treated Cyril than that he had ill-treated her, and Philippa fell back on the theory of a misunderstanding, for which both might perhaps be slightly to blame, but no more. Her parents took an equal delight in the reconciliation, for they knew, as Philippa could not know, the true story of the long waiting-time during which the Queen’s hair had grown grey, and of the broken engagement which had made such a grievous blank in her life.

After dinner it was decided that the mildness of the season justified the seeming rashness, and the Queen led her guests out into the marble-paved courtyard. There was a good deal of happy talk about the future as they sat under the carved arcades of curious inlaid work, and watched the fountains springing up among the orange- and lemon-trees. The rest remembered afterwards that Cyril refused, with some impatience, to discuss the probability of his obtaining the governorship of Palestine. It was in the hands of the Powers, he said, and the less it was talked about the better were his chances. He changed the subject almost irritably, but there was no other cloud upon the brightness of the evening. Even Mansfield was happy, although he was not included in the party. He had been dining with the household, and now, as he stood leaning against the pillars at the

other end of the courtyard, smoking with M. Stefanovics, he could feast his eyes upon what seemed to him the most beautiful sight in the world. The blue and silver wrap which Philippa had thrown about her had fallen back, and the moonbeams lighted up her crown of golden curls. Not even the fact of his exclusion from the Queen's table could sadden Mansfield, for Philippa had been disappointed about it, Philippa had said it was a shame, Philippa had refused to see reason in the matter until she had appealed in vain to her uncle himself.

But while at one end of the courtyard Philippa, sitting beside the Queen, painted glowing pictures of the future, and Mansfield, at the other, watched her and dreamt delicious dreams, a loud shouting became audible. The sound came from the street, which was separated from the inner court by an outer one, occupied by the Queen's suite and the servants. Some one was demanding admittance, and with no uncertain voice. The group under the arcade turned and looked at one another, as the porter was heard inquiring who the late arrival might be, and Cyril felt himself growing pale. Was there at hand the announcement of a new crisis, with which he must again confess his incapacity to deal? It was not, however, Paschics or the Chevalier, but General Banics, who appeared at the entrance of the passage leading to the door, and taking three strides across the courtyard, announced—

“Madame, his Majesty!”

“How dare you, Banics? I forbade you to announce me!” cried a voice, and King Michael, casting a scathing glance at his former tutor, stepped out into the moonlight after him. “I hope, madame, there is a welcome for me in this delightful gathering?”

The Queen had grasped Cyril's arm involuntarily as her son entered. Now she loosed her clutch, but her fingers closed round his as she stepped forward. “Any reconciliation with me must include him,” was the announce-

ment conveyed by her attitude, and King Michael read it aright.

"You will not refuse to allow me a share in your happiness, mother? My sole desire is to stand beside you on this auspicious occasion, and do honour to your choice. Count, I will tell you frankly that there is no man I would welcome into my family more heartily than yourself."

"No reason whatever to doubt that statement!" thought Cyril grimly, while the Queen, her eyes full of tears, raised her son and kissed him as he stooped to kiss her hand.

"This is the crowning point of my happiness, little son," she murmured, employing the old tender diminutive.

"You have stolen a march upon me, mother," pursued the King, quite at his ease. "I hoped to have the honour of presenting the Lady Philippa to you myself, but you have been before me." Philippa crimsoned with indignation as she yielded her finger-tips unwillingly to be kissed. "My friend Usk, too! And these—I have no need to ask—these must be the honoured parents of the Lady Philippa."

Having saluted Lord and Lady Caerleon with marked distinction, King Michael took a chair, and signed affably to the rest to be seated. "I must apologise for appearing in this dress," he said, looking at his mother, but including Philippa, as he indicated the undress naval uniform he was wearing, "but I have had no opportunity of changing my clothes. I have made no attempt to secure rooms at a hotel, as I hoped my mother might be able to find a corner for me here. I have only two or three people with me—that is all I could bring, since I came as far as Beyrout on a ship of war."

This explanation was ample for those who knew that the Thracian sea-going navy consisted of a single gunboat of moderate size, and the Queen summoned M. Stefanovics and gave him the necessary directions. The King continued to converse with the greatest affability, "patronising the whole

show," as Usk complained to Mansfield afterwards, but the pleasantness of the evening had vanished with his entrance. That the Queen felt this she showed when she rose as the signal for her guests to depart. She had meant this family party to be free from the trammels of Court etiquette, but how could she carry out her intention when her son made evident in every word and action the intense condescension with which he was prepared to behave towards her new relations?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HISTORY OF AN EVENING.

"I DID not expect to see you here to-night, Mr Mansfield."

"I had no idea of coming, madame, but his Excellency insisted upon it. M. Paschics is here too."

"Do you know whether Prince Ramon of Arragon has visited Count Mortimer yet?"

"Yes, madame, this afternoon."

"You don't happen to have heard what he thought of his health?"

"No, madame, I did not like to ask; but his Excellency seemed quite cheerful this evening. When I left the house, he was busy with his servant, looking over his things, I think."

"I am glad he was in good spirits, but I should like to know exactly. Might I trouble you to ask Prince Ramon to come and speak to me?"

"I am honoured, madame."

In order to welcome the illustrious visitors to Damascus, the Pannonian, Hercynian, and Thracian consuls had joined forces, determining to provide an entertainment that should throw into the shade everything of the kind that had been hitherto attempted in the city. Strings of bright-coloured lamps, rich draperies, and a profusion of greenery, had transformed the inner courtyard of the Pannonian Consulate,

which was covered in for the occasion, into a fairy palace, and the display of dazzling uniforms, Parisian gowns, and gay national costumes, was not unworthy of its frame. Cyril was the only person of note at present in Damascus who was not to be seen, and although the Queen had begged him not to come, she felt vaguely uneasy at his absence. She welcomed Don Ramon with an anxious smile as he approached her, not in the best of tempers. Mansfield had disturbed him in the midst of a deeply interesting conversation. It was the Prince's habit to carry his scientific researches even into his hours of ease, and the sight of a magnificent-looking old Syrian with a venerable white beard had proved an irresistible temptation. A request to be allowed to call upon him and take some measurements of his head had terrified the old man, and it was with the utmost relief that he took advantage of Mansfield's approach to break away from this alarming stranger, quite regardless of his feelings in the matter. Moreover, like most of the Queen's relations, Don Ramon had decided to ignore her intended marriage altogether. Ernestine might disgrace herself by an alliance with a mere noble if she liked, but her family were unaware of the existence of any such presumptuous person as her future husband. The Prince had visited Cyril at her request that afternoon, not as her *fiancé*, but as a former valued servant of the Thracian crown. His outraged family feelings combined at this moment with his scientific preoccupation to make his manner more than usually brusque.

"You have seen Count Mortimer, cousin?" the Queen asked him timidly. "I hope your opinion is favourable?"

"Favourable, my dear cousin? The man's case is hopeless!"

"Hopeless!" she grasped at a pillar to support herself. "But what is the matter with him?"

"If I describe the injury in technical language you would

be no wiser than before. The brain has ceased to perform one of its functions."

"You mean that he will be—*mad*?"

"No, no; how you ladies rush at conclusions! There is no trace of mania whatever. The man is as sane as I am. He has simply lost the power of connected thought, of planning—plotting, if you like."

"But how can this be? What has happened to him?"

"Over-strain after long and continued fatigue has done the mischief, by what he says."

"But it is only temporary? Rest will cure him?"

"My dear cousin, this is not like the loss of sight or memory which has taken place as the result of a shock, and may be restored by another shock. The power is gone. He says that he felt as though something snapped in his brain, and that will serve very well as a popular description of what has occurred. The connecting-cord is broken, and he is incapable of carrying on a train of thought."

"Oh, what will he do? what will he do?" moaned the Queen.

"Pray do not distress yourself, cousin. Many very worthy persons are born without the faculty of connected thought, and live happy lives, unconscious of the defect."

If they were born without it, perhaps. But Cyril, who had possessed and lost it?

"You told him, cousin?"

"Naturally. He is not a child. He received the news with the utmost coolness, and conversed cheerfully as he escorted me to the door. But, my dear cousin, you are ill—about to faint. Allow me to call my wife, or one of your ladies."

"No! no!" Ernestine seized his arm and held him back. "Take me to the cloakroom, that is all, and fetch Lord or Lady Caerleon. I want no one else. Don't let people make a scene."

She sank upon the couch to which he led her, and sat there with clenched hands and staring eyes until he returned with Philippa, the only member of the family whom he could find disengaged at the moment. Receiving another fervent entreaty to say nothing of Ernestine's indisposition, he withdrew, and she turned frantically to Philippa.

"Will you come with me to your uncle, at once? He has had bad news, there is something wrong with his brain, and he has been told it too suddenly. His friends are away, and the shock——" Her voice failed her, but Philippa read in the piteous eyes the unspoken fear which had seized herself as she listened, and she grasped the two trembling hands in her own.

"Oh yes, yes; let us come this moment. Usk or Mr Mansfield will help us."

But Usk was the centre of a group of laughing Greek girls, who were teaching him to pronounce their language properly, and Mansfield, having failed to get a word with Philippa all evening, had wandered away disconsolately with Mr Judson. Even Mr Hicks, engrossed in subjecting a Latin bishop to an informal interview, was so busy that Philippa could not catch his eye.

"There is only that elderly officer who belongs to your suite, madame, that I can see," she said, hurrying back to the Queen.

"Banics? Oh, fetch him—he can be trusted."

Philippa obeyed, and Ernestine addressed the astonished General with feverish eagerness. "Find us a carriage, Banics. I must go at once to Count Mortimer's lodgings—at once, at once."

"At this hour, madame? Allow me to request his Excellency to wait upon you instead," was the sole protest General Banics permitted himself, but his mistress waved it aside wildly.

"You will kill me with all this delay! Find a carriage quickly. I tell you we must go at once."

He hurried out, and Philippa wrapped the Queen in a dark cloak, drawing the hood over her head. They stood waiting breathlessly until General Banics reappeared, having taken forcible possession of the first carriage he came across. It belonged to a private individual, but a *bakhshish* to the servants, added to the awe-inspiring effect of the General's uniform and his manner, enabled him to hire it for a short time, and he helped the ladies in and took his seat upon the box in disapproving silence. A short drive, during which the Queen and Philippa held each other's hands in an agony of fear, brought them to the Hebrew quarter. To Philippa's intense relief, although she could hardly have told why she felt relieved, the door of Cyril's Jewish host stood open, and the porter was lounging on the threshold talking to a friend, so that the commotion usually needed before entrance could be obtained was not called for. Earlier in the day, Philippa and her parents had partaken of coffee with the family, in a scene that might have come straight from the pages of 'Tancred,' but now every one was away at the consuls' entertainment, with the exception of the aged grandfather, who was roused from his slumbers by the servants, and came forth blinking and bewildered. Fortunately he recognised Philippa, but precious time passed while he lamented the unfitness of his poor house to receive the exalted young lady, wringing his hands the while. She cut him short at last in desperation.

"I must see my uncle at once, please. It is most important that this lady should speak to him. No, no; you are not to say that we are here!"

Fairly dashing past the servants, who were already starting off to announce her presence, she dragged the Queen in the direction of the staircase which led to Cyril's rooms on the upper floor, leaving the old man still wringing his hands

and murmuring feebly something about coffee. No one guessed who the elder woman was who followed Philippa so closely as she crossed the courtyard, although General Banics thought it well to station himself at the foot of the staircase, in case curiosity should be roused as to her identity. Entering the passage from which the rooms opened, the two ladies were confronted by the valet Dietrich, who appeared to have been placidly smoking a huge pipe in the dark.

"Where is Count Mortimer, Dietrich? I want to speak to him." Philippa lowered her voice involuntarily.

"At work, gracious one. He must not be disturbed."

"You know he never meant you were to keep me out. Let me pass, please."

"Alas, gracious one! I have his Excellency's orders to admit no one."

"Dietrich!" Ernestine threw back her hood, and the flash of her diamonds dazzled the valet's astonished eyes; "you must let me through. It is a matter of life and death for your master."

"Pardon, Majesty, I dare not. I have my orders."

Ernestine clasped her hands wildly. Philippa drew her aside.

"Slip round by the verandah while I distract Dietrich's attention here," she whispered hurriedly, and pushing past the servant, almost succeeded in gaining the door. While he sprang forward to stop her, the Queen slipped away and ran round to the window. It was open. Cyril was standing with his back to her, looking narrowly into something which he was holding up close to his eye.

"Cyril!" she shrieked, bursting into the room. He started violently, but as he turned to her he thrust what he was holding under a piece of paper lying on the table.

"Ernestine! how you startled me! You here—at this hour? What is the matter?"

"Give it to me! give it to me!" she cried, rushing to the table. As she had expected, a pistol lay under the paper. Cyril's hand came upon hers with a firm grasp as she snatched it up.

"No, no, you shall not! Before my eyes, Cyril!" she screamed, trying to wrest the weapon from him. How it happened she could not tell, but as she struggled with him there was a sudden explosion, and a bullet whizzed close to her head, singeing her hair in its passage. Dazed and deafened, she loosed her hold of the pistol.

"There!" she cried, laughing hysterically. "Better me than yourself!"

Cyril, with an ashy face, picked up the pistol, which had fallen to the ground. The door opened impetuously, and Philippa's horrified face looked in. Seeing that neither was hurt, she closed the door again, and meeting General Banics at the top of the stairs, assured him, in a voice which she vainly tried to render steady, that there was nothing wrong. A pistol had gone off by accident, that was all.

"Are you hurt, Ernestine? How came you here?"

"I wish I was hurt! I wish I had been killed!" she cried frantically, "for then you might have been sorry. Cyril, Cyril, I thought you loved me, and you don't."

"You are talking wildly, my dearest."

"You don't, and there is the proof of it." She pointed to the discharged pistol. "It is cruel of you. What have I done that you should kill yourself to be rid of me?"

"Be reasonable, Ernestine. This is an old pistol that I came across in turning out my things. Am I to blame if it should happen to be loaded? Accidents with fire-arms are not absolutely unheard-of events."

"Oh, that was what the world was to believe, was it?" She swept him a superb curtsy. "Many thanks! But it is unnecessary to try to deceive me. I have spoken to Ramon, I know all. Cyril, my beloved," her voice took a tone of the

most poignant reproach, "have I deserved this? Am I such a fair-weather friend that you can't trust me to cling to you in trouble as well as in prosperity?"

"My dear Ernestine, it is because I know you would cling to me that I decline to drag you down with my wretched self. I thought I should have a kingdom to offer you; I find I shan't have even an independence. Therefore——" he pointed to the pistol.

"But you know that I only cared for the kingdom for your sake. Oh, Cyril, it is you I love, you I want. Your life is mine; you cannot—dare not—rob me of it. Think of the many years you made me suffer in loneliness. You owe me all those."

He was silent, and she crept closer to him.

"Beloved, you don't regret that I came in? that you have been held back from taking your life like a coward? I would never have believed any one who told me that you were afraid to face any future. You will be greater in adversity than in success. God is sending you this trial that your true strength may be shown." Cyril shifted his position impatiently. "You would not, in a moment of despair, refuse the trial, fail under the test, and destroy your soul for ever?"

"Really, Ernestine, this kind of argument has no weight with me."

"Then perhaps this will weigh with you." Stung by his tone, she tore the diamond cross from her neck and held it towards him. "Whatever you do not believe, you know that God and Heaven and eternal judgment are realities to me. Understand, then, that if you take your own life, either to-night or afterwards, I swear that I will do the same, solemnly believing that my soul will be lost for ever in consequence of the deed. Oh, what am I saying?" She paused and trembled, but as he tried to wrest the cross from her, her fingers tightened upon it more firmly. "Yes, I will do it, without

hesitation. God forgive me—no, I dare not ask Him to forgive me—God forgive you, if you drive me to it.”

Cyril dropped into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. She stood beside him, awaiting his decision with perfect calmness.

“If you die, I die,” she said again. At last he looked up.

“I give in, Ernestine. But I think you will often repent this evening’s work.”

“Never, even if you do.”

“I? I shall repent it every day—every hour—of my existence.” It was the bitter cry of the man who sees every interest and every pleasure in life snatched from him in a moment. “I am a useless, brainless log, and you force me to live.”

“Dearest, there is still so much that you can do.” The woman’s unselfishness led her to try to comfort him in his own way, instead of resenting the little value he set upon her love. “You never even discovered your loss until a very momentous crisis arose. If Philippa marries Michael, you can return to Thracia, and become Premier again.”

“Are you trying to tempt me to sacrifice poor Phil? Don’t you see that I could never go back to office as a humdrum, routine, red-tape Minister, incapable of effecting combinations or making bold strokes? I could not face a horrible monotony of that sort.”

“Then we will settle down in England, near——”

“And add another specimen to the British collection of political failures from the Continent? Hear myself continually pointed out as an awful warning of the dangers of leaving the beaten track? Never!”

“Well, then, we will go back to Sitt Zeynab. You shall reign there in peace, and no one can come near you against your will. Wherever you are, there I shall be happy.”

“My poor Ernestine, I am not worth it. You had better let me die, dear.” His eyes sought the pistol longingly. “I

am a miserable, broken wretch, with no hope and no contentment left, and I shall lead you a terrible life."

"No life with you could be terrible to me. To be near you is joy enough. It was not your success I loved, it was you, and you are the same still. I love you, Cyril, I love you."

The passion of the tone, the eyes shining into his, the trembling hands laid upon his shoulders, stirred Cyril with a stronger emotion than he had ever known, and words came to his lips,—echoes, perhaps, of others heard long before in his childhood—he knew not how or whence.

"God do so to me and more also, Ernestine, if I ever forget what you have done for me to-night. Dearest, you understand. Some women would have upbraided me for despising their love, but you are not like that. And you will have your reward. Politics will never again separate me from you, at any rate." He kissed her gently on the forehead, and wrapped her cloak round her. "You must go back, dear, or you will be missed. A curious little interlude in the evening's entertainment, isn't it? Well, your coming here has saved me, such as I am."

Ernestine choked down her sobs as she clung to him. "You will live because I want you," she said. "Perhaps you can't rule the world, beloved, but you can make one woman very happy. You have done it already, and she is grateful."

She went out, and found Philippa waiting anxiously in the passage.

"It's all right, Phil. We have saved him," she said, holding the girl's hand tightly in hers as they passed down the steps and across the courtyard.

"But what had happened to him?" asked Philippa breathlessly, when they were in the carriage again.

"Something has given way in his brain. He will never be able to plan again."

"He can't plan? Oh, poor Uncle Cyril!" cried Philippa, appalled.

"Phil, you must help me to keep it a secret—at any rate until after we are married. I know they will part me from him if they can. Once I am his wife I don't care what happens. Only his real friends must know of this terrible trouble, such as your father and the Chevalier Goldberg. And we must keep Michael in a good temper. My child, you see why he has come here? His manner in addressing you last night showed that sufficiently. Is there any hope for him? You know how I should rejoice to welcome you as a daughter."

"I would do anything else in the world for you and Uncle Cyril," burst from Philippa, "but not that. I don't love him in the least. I don't even—like him," she was about to say, but changed it, feebly enough, into—"care for him."

"It is not your fault, Phil. I ought to be the first person to know that love is not at one's own command. But oh, dear child, if you could abstain from refusing him until after the wedding is over! I don't mean that you should deceive him, of course, but if only you could prevent his proposing to you——"

"I'll do what I can," said Philippa doubtfully, but she felt that if King Michael had determined to propose to her, it was probable that he would do so, in spite of any obstacles she might put in his way. That this intuition of hers was a correct one she discovered as soon as she re-entered the assembly-room with the Queen. Her father was standing not far from the cloakroom door, and stepped forward to meet her.

"Why, Phil, I have been looking for you everywhere! I could not think what had become of you until the Prince of Arragon told me that he had left you with her Majesty."

"Yes; I was seized with a sudden faintness, and Philippa

was kind enough to remain with me until I felt better," said Ernestine graciously, bestowing one of her rare smiles on Philippa as she turned towards the Thracian consul, who was anxious to present a relative to her.

"Phil," said Lord Caerleon, taking his daughter aside, "the King has been speaking to me about you."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Philippa, in dismay.

"I suppose I ought to feel honoured," continued her father ruefully, "but that youth riles me—there's no other word for it. He asked to be allowed to visit me to-morrow at the hotel, graciously intimating that he considered me as in a sort of way a brother monarch, and therefore felt able to dispense with strict etiquette. I guessed what he wanted, and thought we might just as well settle matters without getting your name mixed up with his, so I said I couldn't think of giving him the trouble. Thereupon he did you the honour to request me in so many words to regard him as a suitor for your hand, this being merely preliminary, as he explained, to a formal proposal through the proper channels. I said I hadn't had any conversation with you lately on such subjects, but judging from the sentiments you expressed on the last occasion, I couldn't give him any hope. Upon that he informed me that I wasn't up to date. He is now a reformed character, father of his country and so on, the condescending patron of everything that's good. I don't want to laugh at any man's reformation, Phil, but the fellow takes himself too seriously. I told him I didn't see that it was much good bothering you about the matter, and he became very high and mighty indeed. He reminded me that young ladies did not receive offers of marriage from crowned heads every day, and intimated that such an honour ought to be accepted in a proper spirit. In other words, he warns you not to reject his offer without due consideration. I am telling you about it because he insisted I should, and I thought he might turn rusty and make some unpleasantness

if I didn't, but having laid the proposal before you, I can now go with a good conscience and tell him you refuse it."

"Wait, father, please!" cried Philippa, in an uncertain voice. "I—I think I will take time to consider."

Her father turned and gazed at her. "Phil!" he said, with more sorrow and disappointment in his voice than she had ever heard in it before.

"I think it's only proper, as he says," went on Philippa, with a laugh that was a little hysterical. "Don't you, father? I—I should not like to be too hasty."

"Phil, I wouldn't insult you by imagining that you could be induced to marry a man you didn't love for the sake of a crown, but what in the world are you driving at? You needn't think anything of what I said just now about the fellow's making himself unpleasant to your uncle and the Queen, for what harm could he do, after all?" Philippa shuddered. Her father did not know what terrible harm King Michael might do if he chose. "But at any rate, don't give him a moral claim upon you in this way. It's quite unnecessary to be so tender of his feelings."

"Oh no, no moral claim," said Philippa entreatingly. "You can tell him you are perfectly certain that delay will make no change in my feelings, but that if he wishes it, I will consent not to give him a final answer until the day after the wedding. It's—it's due to his position, father." She laughed again. "I'm sure you can make him see it in that light."

"I can't make you out, Phil," said Lord Caerleon doubtfully, as he left her. Presently he returned, pulling at his moustache in a way that showed him to be still puzzled.

"Well, Phil, I have given him your message, and he accepts it as merely his due. I can swear I've done my best to choke him off, but he won't have it. I think he understands that he's not to come hanging about the hotel, setting people talking, but he may do what he can, without

making you conspicuous, to prepossess you in his favour—in conversation and so on. He seems very well satisfied, and I hope you are. I wish with all my heart you were safely engaged to—er—some other fellow.”

“Are you determining to turn me out of doors if I accept King Michael, father? Don’t you think your way of receiving a king as a would-be son-in-law is just a little—original?”

“Why, Phil?” cried her father in distress, catching sight at last of the tears in her eyes.

“Oh, father, I’m so miserable—so frightened—I don’t know what to do!” and Philippa laid her golden head on his shoulder, and sobbed there comfortably, as if she had gone back ten years, and been a little girl again.

“Do you want me to get rid of the fellow for you, Phil? I’ll do it like a shot. King or no king, I won’t have him making you cry with his silly nonsense.”

“No, no, it’s not that. Lend me your handkerchief, father dear. This lace thing is no good. Don’t you think mother would come home now?”

“I’m sure she would. I’ll go and ask her,” and poor Lord Caerleon went away thoroughly puzzled. Hitherto nothing had ever interrupted the perfect understanding between Philippa and himself, but now he was realising miserably that his little daughter had become a woman, and Lord Caerleon had always confessed that he did not understand women.

“Mansfield,” said Usk abruptly, when he and his friend were leaving the Consulate in company a little later, “that idiot is after Philippa again.”

“What, that Thracian beast?” Mansfield’s language was far from choice, but he was not without provocation. “Well, your father will soon kick him out.”

“That’s what I thought, but there’s no chance of that

now. She has taken time to consider her answer, and we know what that means. I thought I'd tell you myself, before—before you could hear it from any one else." Mansfield gasped, and Usk went on hurriedly, "I wouldn't have believed it, but the fellow told me himself. Perhaps it's a lie."

"No fear!" was the sternly hopeless answer. "What would be the good, when a word with your father would put you right at once? She has been over-persuaded."

"Yes, I know how it is. He has got round her with the notion that it's her duty to sacrifice herself to him for the sake of his rotten kingdom, like a girl in a book. I'm awfully sorry, Mansfield—sick, too."

Mansfield answered only by an inarticulate grunt.

"I wouldn't have believed Phil was such an owl," went on her brother. "Every one knows that sort of arrangement is bound to end in an awful smash. But never say die, old man; she may chuck him yet."

"Not she," returned Mansfield, with a fixed despair.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAN AND WIFE.

"THIS is the irony of fate!" said Mansfield to himself the next morning. The English mail had come in, and the city postman, going his leisurely rounds on his white donkey, was engaged in distributing the letters it brought. A few minutes before, he had placed in Mansfield's hands that which should have been his passport to paradise. The Right Honourable Geoffrey Forfar wrote to say that one of his secretaries had accepted an appointment under Government, and he had much pleasure in fulfilling his promise with regard to the vacant post. Would Mansfield kindly arrange to take up his new duties as soon as his present employer could spare him?

Mr Forfar would have been surprised to learn that his kindly letter served but to inflict on its recipient torments worse than those of Tantalus. If the offer had only arrived yesterday, Mansfield reflected bitterly, he might have spoken to Philippa in time to forestall her royal suitor—but no, it did not turn up until Philippa was beyond his reach. That was how things always happened, he assured himself, for misfortune was developing in him the usual touch of cynicism. For a short time he had visions of accepting the post and returning to England forthwith, throwing himself into his new work with an ardour that carried all before it. He saw

himself entering the House, backed by Mr Forfar's influence and the prestige of his own reputation as a man with an unusual and practical knowledge of European politics, saw himself, equally famous as a thinker and a debater, accepting office and rising to giddy heights of power—and this was all undertaken for the sake of convincing the faithless Philippa that the true lover whom she had cast off to obtain a throne would have been able to give her something more than the love she despised. Unfortunately for Mansfield's political future, his heart took fright instantly at the idea of leaving Syria while Philippa remained there. He must be on the spot, even if it was only to witness the complete destruction of his hopes. It is possible, also, that those hopes were not yet quite so absolutely dead as he imagined.

"I won't answer this at once," he said, thrusting the letter into his pocket, and turned to some notes which he was to write out for Cyril. He had scarcely sat down when he was interrupted by the Chevalier, who emerged from the inner room in a state of wild disorder. When he had asked to see Cyril, Mansfield had observed that he appeared to be labouring under great emotion, but now he seemed to have been tearing both his hair and his clothes. He dropped into a chair opposite Mansfield, and smote his forehead with his hands.

"De finest brain in Europe, and de stronk defence off Zion!" he murmured.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mansfield, astonished.

"You do not know? you hef not heard? All we hef done iss in fain, and Israel may return to deir keptifity to-morrow."

"What has gone wrong?" Mansfield asked the question with great anxiety.

"Your master can plen no more; his brain iss inchured. And we, wid our scheme on de point of fulfilment, are left desolate."

"That break-down the other day!" cried Mansfield.

"Yes, det must hef been de first menifestation off de melody. Ach, Mortimer, my frient, I could always trust in you! While you lifed, Zion was safe. And now you life still, but your mind iss dead. No, no," as Mansfield started up frantically, "dere iss no medness. He can do eferythink but plen, but so can all de rest. Our head iss gone."

"And now that he can't help you, you care no more about him?"

"Hef I gifen you reasson to say det?" asked the Chevalier, with real dignity. "Because I lament my country in peril, must I hef lost sight off my frient? It iss de Queen det hess told me de frightful noose. Ah, dere iss a woman! de Count hess much left still since he hess her. She dessired to point out to me de risk. You see it? Efery nation and efery statesman hess somethink against him. He hess played dem all off against one anoder, and only his wits hef safed him again and again. Now he iss powerless, and when dey find it out, dey will come about him like birds off prey. A week ago de influence off de Syndicate, exerted through me, would hef presserfed him from all annoyance, but now de Syndicate iss split in two. Until we discofer how far de disaffection extends, I dare not trust efen my broders. Your master must not remain here, nor would he be safe in Europe—efen in America. De Queen propoces det immediately upon deir merrich dey shell go to dis estate off hers in de desert, where dey will be in safety until efents hef defeloped demselfs. We shell soon see what frients he hess left. I need not ask wheder you are true. Do me de fafour to believe det I am so also, efen dough my nation hess profed ungrateful to its benefector."

"I am sorry," said Mansfield. "I had no business to say what I did."

"Det iss well. Trust me, and help me to do what I can for him, det iss all I ask."

He went away, and Mansfield took Mr Forfar's letter out of

his pocket again. "This settles it!" he said, and sitting down at the table, dashed off a grateful refusal of the Prime Minister's offer. As soon as it was finished, he went out and posted it.

Having thus burnt his boats and cut himself off from every hope of Philippa, he felt that he had done all that could be expected of him, and owed himself a reward. It is needless to say that the reward took the shape of a sight of Philippa, and when he had dutifully attended Cyril to the Queen's house in the afternoon, he betook himself forthwith to the Caerleons' rooms in Spyridion's hotel, where he was able to watch Philippa pouring out tea, and to luxuriate in absolute misery. The excitement of the night before had left Philippa white and tired, and her hand shook as she lifted the teapot, but Mansfield decided that her exhaustion was due to the mental struggle she must have undergone before she could bring herself to contemplate marrying King Michael, and he steeled his heart against her. Her father attributed her obvious unhappiness to a very different cause, and when Mansfield took his leave he walked a little way with him.

"I suppose you heard nothing from Forfar by the mail, Mansfield?" he asked. "I saw him just before we left England, and he hinted that Jowell would probably go to the India Office, so that he would soon need a new assistant secretary."

"Yes, I heard from him," replied Mansfield, his heart beginning to beat with uncomfortable speed, "and he offered me the post. But I refused it."

"Refused it!" cried Lord Caerleon, with unconcealed dismay.

"You see," Mansfield went on, "I—I felt there was no particular reason why I should go back to England," he looked straight at his companion, "and it would take a great deal to make me leave Count Mortimer in the present state of his affairs."

"But come, Mansfield—I have a right to ask, after what you said to me early in the year—have you changed your mind?"

"How dare you——" began Mansfield furiously, then his tone altered. "I beg your pardon, I'm a sulky brute; but—well, imagine that you were in my place, Lord Caerleon, forbidden to speak to Lady Phil, and then finding that another fellow had stepped in and cut you out."

"But he has not cut you out. We are all on your side. Phil's only reason for taking time to consider her answer is that she may not hurt the King's feelings. I am certain she doesn't care a rap for him."

"Well, at any rate, I'm not such a cad as to cut in and spoil the other fellow's game," and Mansfield marched on with an air of superior virtue which Lord Caerleon found extremely irritating. He could not well say that he particularly wished to see the very thing done which Mansfield regarded with such righteous disapprobation, but he felt that he was being treated with scant justice. True, he had banished Mansfield originally for his own good—here he stopped; was it not rather because he did not want to lose his daughter? Still, it was not his fault that this second suitor had appeared, and nothing had been farther from his thoughts than to drive Philippa into a loveless marriage by separating her from the man whom he now suspected that she liked. It was hard to throw the onus of rejecting the King's suit entirely on Philippa and himself, and things would have been much simpler if it could have been refused on the ground that she was already engaged to some one else. However, since Mansfield chose to consider that he had been ill-used, and could hardly be commanded to propose to Philippa against his will, the plan was not practicable.

Lord Caerleon made no further attempt to alter the course of events, and Mansfield, grimly resolute, continued to torment himself with the sight of Philippa and her royal suitor.

King Michael was following Prince Mirkovics' advice, and endeavouring to enlist Philippa's sense of duty upon his side. Since his *coup d'état* of the summer, he had developed an abnormal interest in affairs of State, and he recounted his plans, hopes, fears, failures, successes, and aspirations to Philippa at suitable length. The recital bored her extremely, but she would not have been her mother's daughter if she could have brought herself to throw cold water on any man's good intentions, and she honestly did her best to sympathise with the King. Her task was not made easier by Usk, who continued to regard his would-be brother-in-law with unmitigated aversion. King Michael sought his acquaintance in the most flattering way, and extended the same honour to Mansfield and Mr Judson, never perceiving that his gracious determination to put people at their ease had the invariable effect of making them uncomfortable. The three Cambridge men were quite ready to overlook his position, which was, after all, not his own fault; but he could not forget it, and the consequence was that the friendship languished, and that among themselves they accused him of "putting on side," and stigmatised him as "wretchedly bad form." It is true that Usk once expressed in private a wish that the King was his brother; but only, as he explained immediately, that he might feel justified in punching his head.

While Philippa's affairs were in this unsettled state, the time of her uncle's marriage was rapidly approaching. The wedding had been fixed for New Year's day, and it had been the secret design of the Chevalier and his party that after the ceremony a deputation from the Jewish provisional government should wait upon the newly-married pair and offer them the crown, if such it might be called, of Palestine. But this was now recognised to be out of the question. When the sensation caused by the appearance of the Yellow Pamphlet, and the subsequent repudiation of Cyril by half the Jewish world, had a little subsided, the journalists of the

Continent held their breath for a time, realising what they had done. The man whom they had helped to vilify had never been known to forgive an insult, and the issue of that *brutum fulmen*, the message framed by Mr Hicks and Paschics in order to gain time, threw them into a state approaching panic. What blow had Count Mortimer in preparation?

But as the days passed on and still nothing happened, a sensation of relief diffused itself visibly among Cyril's opponents, while his supporters became correspondingly dejected. Presently a brief message from the Emperor of Pannonia, forwarded through the Chevalier's confidential agent in Vindobona, put the question in a nutshell. What measures did Count Mortimer mean to take in order to re-establish his predominant influence in the counsels of the Syndicate? Whether the charges brought against him in the Yellow Pamphlet were true or false did not signify in the least; but unless the Jews were unanimous in preferring him to any other ruler, the Emperor could go no further in recommending his selection by the Powers. While the question of the answer to be returned to this intimation was being discussed between Cyril and the Chevalier—the one in a frenzy of alarm and indecision, the other in an agony of helplessness—the matter was taken out of their hands. It became known throughout Europe that Count Mortimer's brain was affected, and that he was no longer to be feared.

How the jealously guarded secret had leaked out could not at first be discovered, but the report was afterwards traced to Don Ramon of Arragon's assistant, who had access to his case-books. He had been a student of the University of Vindobona, and was therefore almost inevitably an anti-Semite, and he had shared his discovery with Colonel Czartoriski, with whom he had come in contact at Damascus. Acting upon instructions from his mistress, Colonel Czartoriski communicated the news to the press, and Anti-Semitism all over the Continent went mad with joy. Nor were the

professed enemies of Zion alone in their exultation, for the Government papers (those of Pannonia and Thracia alone excepted) took up the slanderous tale in language equally bitter, if slightly more decorous. The man who had known how to impose his will on Europe was helpless—might be knocked down and jumped upon, metaphorically speaking—and there was no lack of moralists to improve the occasion. The vilest calumnies, the most outrageous accusations, were gravely detailed as matters of fact, the attacks growing bolder as each historian, finding that the victim made no sign, strove to outdo his neighbour. The statesmen who had smarted under Cyril's yoke added their quota of titbits of confidential information, to be duly worked up by the fortunate journalist to whom they were whispered, the result being generally a fable that astonished no one more than the original narrator himself. In short, the only wonder was that the political world could have been so long held in subjection by a charlatan so abjectly worthless and contemptible as Count Mortimer was shown to be.

But while the storm was raging in Europe, and its echoes reached with painful distinctness the ears of the little group of friends at Damascus, there reached them also an intimation that behind all the sound and fury there was a purpose that signified something. On the morning of the 28th of December, General Banics paid an early visit, first to Lord Caerleon and then to the Chevalier, bringing an urgent request from Queen Ernestine that they would come to her at once. Apprehensive of danger, they lost no time in complying, and as they were ushered into the Queen's presence, Ernestine came forward to meet them in her impulsive way, holding out her hands.

"I have sent for you," she said, "because you are dear and faithful friends of mine, and I can trust you to help me in the frightful danger which is threatening the man we all love. You will not let them separate me from him?"

"Nefer, unless it iss your Machesty's own dessire," said the Chevalier.

"But we know that nothing could be further from the Queen's wishes," said Lord Caerleon indignantly. "Command us, madame, for anything that we can do."

"I knew I could rely upon you both." She cast an encouraging glance at the discomfited Chevalier. "Then please sit down, and let me tell you what I have heard this morning from my dear old friend Princess Soudaroff. She says she was afraid to telegraph, lest the message should be stopped or the enemy discover that we had been warned, but she writes in the greatest anxiety and haste. She is at present in Paris, and her brother-in-law, Prince Soudaroff, had just paid her a flying visit when she wrote. Naturally, as she says, they discussed Count Mortimer's misfortunes, and something that Prince Soudaroff let fall gave her the idea that a plot was preparing against him. She questioned him closely, and though he evaded her inquiries with the most consummate skill, she is convinced that the Emperor Sigismund and my own family are taking measures to prevent our marriage. What roused her suspicions was a remark which escaped Prince Soudaroff about a Hercynian ship of war suddenly ordered to the Levant, and she suggests that they will attempt to kidnap the Count before New Year's Day, and convey him to some place of confinement on the plea that he is mad. They will act in my interests, to save me from such an unfortunate marriage, you see! But I won't be saved from it. How shall we checkmate them?"

"Madame," said the Chevalier, as she paused abruptly, her eyes bright and her cheeks flushed, "de Goldberg millions hef profed demselves off little afail lately, but at least dey will suffice to buy de gerrison*off Damascus for a week. Efery men in it shell be your serfant, and guard de Count."

"But is such a measure advisable?" asked Lord Caerleon. "The other side can out-bribe us, and bring diplomatic pres-

sure to bear as well. How would you like to steal a march on them, madame? You are not inclined to set an inordinate value upon wedding-dresses and festivities?"

"In comparison with the bridegroom?" Ernestine smiled. "No, indeed. If it had not been for the wishes of my son and my faithful servants, I would have chosen the quietest wedding possible."

"Under the circumstances, madame, his Majesty and your ladies will no doubt waive their natural wishes. The time required by law for publishing the notice of the intended marriage at the British Consulate expires to-day. To-morrow, then——"

"I see," said the Queen, blushing brightly.

"His Excellency Count Mortimer, madame," said General Banics, presenting himself at the door, and Cyril entered the room, his unexpected appearance making the three conspirators look highly confused.

"What are you plotting against me?" he asked sharply.

"Do you know that you have not wished me good morning?" asked Ernestine, rising. "Our friends will excuse us for a moment, I know," and she made him a sign to follow her out into the verandah. After a few minutes they returned, Ernestine flushed and smiling, with her hand in his.

"Caerleon, Chevalier," said Cyril, "you have heard of the new danger that threatens me, and you know that the Queen"—he raised her hand to his lips—"would not refuse to share it. But to avoid complications, and to forestall the enemy, she has consented to allow our marriage to take place to-morrow instead of New Year's Day."

"A good idea. Very sensible and prudent," said Lord Caerleon heartily, admiring the delicate tact with which Ernestine had contrived to make the suggestion come from Cyril instead of herself. "We had decided that it would be better for the marriage to take place at the Consulate in any case, so that it will make no difference."

"I understand that Mr Judson can perform the service at the Consulate," said the Queen quickly. "I should not like a purely civil marriage."

"Det iss all right," said the Chevalier. "I hef talked to Colonel Monckton a great deal about de metter. De merrich can take place et de Consulate in his pressence, and nothink more will be wanted."

"Perhaps," said Lord Caerleon to his brother, rather doubtfully, "it might be as well if you left for the desert immediately after the ceremony. If there is any idea of kidnapping you, they might still carry you off, and set the lawyers to work to declare the marriage invalid."

"We will leave Damascus as soon as the ceremony is performed," said the Queen calmly. "When we are together and out of their reach they can do nothing against us. The Emperor Sigismund has no jurisdiction over me, and no court in the world would deny that Count Mortimer, an Englishman born, could be legally married at a British Consulate. On his side the marriage must stand, and if they declare it invalid on mine—well, we will be married over and over again until they are content to allow it to stand. But there must not be the slightest suspicion of any flaw. You will see to that, messieurs?" She looked at the three men.

"There shall be none," responded Lord Caerleon.

"It will be better," said Cyril, "to tell no one but Monckton of our change of plan until the morning. With the best intentions in the world, Phil and the young fellows could not help letting it be seen that they had an important secret in charge, and the least slip might ruin us. I suppose, Chevalier,"—he was fingering absently Princess Soudaroff's letter, which the Queen had asked him to read,—“it has occurred to you that Vladimir Alexandrovitch had some object in giving away his fellow-conspirators like this?"

"You mean det he intended to let you hef a hint to escape, Count?"

"Not necessarily. I think he has some other plan on hand—more important to him, though not to the Emperor Sigismund—and he has deliberately sacrificed his ally in order to divert your attention from his own game."

"But what iss det?" cried the Chevalier distractedly.

"Ah, that you must not ask me. I could have told you once, I don't doubt, but now"—he shrugged his shoulders. "Think it out if you can, Chevalier."

"It iss hopeless, Count. I gif it up. My aim now iss to see you safely merried to her Machesty, and I can think of nothink else."

The three conspirators took their leave of the Queen, and departed to put things in train for the next day's ceremony. Lord Caerleon paid a visit to Colonel Monckton, the British Consul, and bespoke his consent to the change of date and his assistance in the necessary arrangements. Cyril sent Paschics to look for Yeshua (the blind man had returned to Damascus with the Queen and her escort), who was to find his way to the sheikh of the Beni Ismail, and tell him that he and his tribe would be needed to guard their sovereign and her husband to Sitt Zeynab two days earlier than the time agreed upon. The Chevalier, on his side, devised a little plan of his own for hoodwinking the enemy, and having laid his train, devoted his attention to procuring the tents and supplies for the journey.

The next morning there was a kind of informal reception at the British Consulate. The Chevalier took Mr Judson there to make final arrangements with the Consul, and Lady Caerleon looked in to have a talk with Mrs Monckton. Paschics appeared with a document which needed signing, and an unfortunate accident led to the invasion of the house by several other and more important guests. The Queen and her son, with General Banics and M. Stefanovics in attendance, were going out for a ride with Lord Caerleon, Philippa, and Usk, but just outside the Consulate the Queen's horse

cast a shoe. It was only natural that her Majesty and her companions should be invited into the house for a few minutes; but it was certainly strange that Baroness von Hilfenstein, Madame Stefanovics, and Fräulein von Staubach should have chosen that particular time for calling upon Mrs Monckton in a body. Possibly, however, they felt the need of some distraction after the shock they had received when their mistress informed them that the exquisite creation in grey and silver, fresh from a Parisian *atelier*, which had arrived that morning, would not be worn on New Year's day. Curiously enough (Philippa said afterwards that the array of coincidences in connection with this wedding surpassed those associated with the name of Mr Wemmick), Cyril invited Mansfield to take a stroll with him as far as the Consulate just at this time.

"What's this I hear about you from my brother, Mansfield?" he asked, as they started; "that you have refused Forfar's post?"

"I prefer to stay with you, Count. I don't want to change."

"But you can't stay with me. Do you know where you are going at this moment? You are going to see me married, which means that we must part."

"But, Count——" gasped Mansfield, in dire dismay.

"I don't wish to be unkind, but doesn't it strike you that you would be just a little *de trop* on the honeymoon trip? And really, you know, it would be a perfect farce for me to drag two secretaries about with me now."

"And you mean to keep Paschics, and kick me out?"

"My dear Mansfield, don't look at me as if I had pierced your young heart to its depths. Paschics must stay with me. He has worked under me more than twenty years, and asks nothing better than to go on as he has done. It would be sheer cruelty to send him adrift at his age. But you have your life before you, and I am

not going to see you stranded in the desert with me or any one else."

"You are not treating me well," said Mansfield hoarsely. "I have not deserved to be turned off at a moment's notice like this. You do it because you know how I—how fond—how much I think of you, and you feel that you can treat me like a dog."

"That's right. Your way of taking it relieves me infinitely. Do you know that your precipitate refusal of Forfar's offer has given me a great deal of trouble?—most inconsiderate of you to bother a man in this way just on the eve of his wedding. The Chevalier and I have put our heads together, and he has found a berth for you——"

"Hang the Chevalier!" cried Mansfield. Cyril went on, unmoved.

"He wants an Englishman to act as his agent in superintending his various model farms and gardens in Palestine. He doesn't expect you to see that he isn't cheated, for that would be hopeless; but he thinks you are capable of discovering whether the work is done or not, which seems to be rather a moot question at present. It will be a life after your own heart, with plenty of riding about. You will choose a spot that suits you and build your house, and in a year or so I haven't a doubt you will bring a wife to inhabit it."

"Why you should say that, I don't know. You know as well as I do——"

"Well?" for Mansfield faltered.

"That Lady Phil will marry King Michael."

"Don't you think you are taking things a little too much for granted?"

"I don't know. I don't care, anyhow. It seems I have to lose everything I care about—first Lady Phil, then you."

Cyril made no answer. Perhaps he had no comfort to offer; perhaps no time to offer it. They were entering the Consulate, and Mr Hicks, who was lounging in the doorway,

greeted them with portentous solemnity and an almost imperceptible wink. The guests who had assembled in such a casual way were gathered in one of the larger rooms, and Mr Judson, wearing his surplice, was in readiness. Often as most of those present had pictured this wedding to themselves, they had never anticipated anything like the real scene—the large bare room, hastily decorated with a collection of European nicknacks and Oriental draperies gathered from all corners of the house, the bride wearing her riding-habit and the bridegroom a tweed suit, and the motley assemblage of spectators, in which King Michael stood side by side with the Chevalier Goldberg, and the American journalist rubbed shoulders with the Thracian Court officials. It was only fitting that the pair whose history had at so many points touched that of the Hebrew race should be united by the son of a Jewish convert; but the irony of the occasion found its climax in the fact that the woman who had risked so much in defence of the forms of her religion should be debarred not only from the services of a clergyman of her own church, but even from the use of a consecrated building, and should bear the deprivation without a murmur.

In an incredibly short space of time the service which seemed so brief and meant so much was over, and Cyril and his wife were receiving the congratulations of the rest. There was small scope for oratory in the farewells. Mansfield's sore heart was a little comforted by the grip of Cyril's hand as he passed him in the doorway, even though the accompanying words were merely, "Don't be a silly fool!" Another horse had been brought round for the Queen's use, and the riding-party made a fresh start; but this time it included Cyril. Paschics and Dietrich were to join their master outside the city, convoying Fräulein von Staubach, who insisted upon her right to attend the Queen now that her turn had come round. The men took off their hats as the party rode away, but turned immediately to rebuke the

ladies for shedding tears. Such a display of pocket-handkerchiefs was calculated to attract undesirable attention, they said, and Baroness von Hilfenstein and Madame Stefanovics retreated into the inmost recesses of the house, to guard against endangering the Queen's safety by their uncontrollable emotion. But the fugitives rode safely through the city and out at the gate, meeting the sheikh as had been arranged, without being challenged by a single official.

That evening the yacht *White Lady*, lying in Beyrout roadstead, suddenly hoisted English colours and the Thracian royal standard, and put to sea, in company with the Thracian gunboat *St Gabriel*. It was remarked as peculiar by curious observers on shore that the Hercynian war-ship which had arrived that morning immediately slipped her cable and followed them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE BITTER CLOSE OF ALL."

"PHIL, I want a word or two with you."

"I'm so glad, father. I've been longing for a talk. Let us come up to the roof."

They mounted to the marble terrace, shaded by orange-trees in pots, and Lord Caerleon began to pull off withered leaves as busily as if he had had no other intention in coming. Suddenly he turned to his daughter, who sat watching him patiently, the usual sparkle of fun missing from her blue eyes.

"Phil, the King wants your answer. You promised he should have it the day after the wedding, and that is to-day."

"I don't think he ought to take a mean advantage of your having put the wedding forward two days, do you, father? But perhaps it's as well to get it over."

"I—I hope you've thought what you're doing, Phil?"

"Well, it hasn't needed very much thought. I have known all along what I should say."

"Phil," Lord Caerleon spoke with tremendous energy, "I am awfully anxious about you. It's not that I distrust your common-sense, for you are old enough to judge for yourself, nor that I suspect you for a moment of intending to marry for the sake of a crown. But I was talking things over with

your mother last night, and she is very much cut up—afraid that your sense of duty will lead you to accept the King. I don't want to bias you unfairly—we have always prided ourselves on leaving you as free as possible—but you may not have thought what such a marriage would involve. I have tested the delights of royalty, you know, and I felt that I could not stand it alone. With your mother to help me I might have managed it, but—you know how things fell out. I suppose it may be different when you are born to it—I am sure I hope so for the sake of all royal personages—but I am absolutely certain that my little girl could never support such a burden and that of a loveless marriage at the same time. I am only thinking of your happiness, Phil.”

“Oh, father, I know that. But I'm not nearly as good as you and mother think. I never dreamed of accepting the King.”

“Phil, Phil! then why did you take time to consider his offer?”

“Don't look so miserable, father. Can't you really guess? It was just after the Queen—Aunt Ernestine, I mean—and I had found out about poor Uncle Cyril. She begged me to keep the King in a good temper, and this was the only way of doing it. And it was quite successful, you see. He has been on his best behaviour the whole time, and everything has gone off well.”

“And now?”

“Oh, now,” Philippa shook herself uncomfortably,—“now I have to pay the bill.”

“I'll settle matters with the King for you, Phil. It wasn't like you to do such a thing, and I shall be horribly ashamed, but your intention was good, at any rate.”

“No, father, I won't put it upon you. I am the sinner, and I must bear the penalty. Yes, I suppose it was rather like doing evil that good might come, wasn't it? You can't think how wicked and miserable I have felt, and Usk and—

people—have been so horrid, and I couldn't explain. But you see how it was, don't you? I would have done anything to help Uncle Cyril."

"Yes, I see, Phil. But I am more sorry than I can say. I am afraid——"

"Oh, father, don't say you are disappointed in me, or you'll break my heart. I don't care if all the whole world turn their backs upon me, if my own people trust me still—indeed I don't."

"Poor little Phil! I hope it mayn't be as bad as that."

"Well, I can't help it if it is. Please let the King come up here, father, if he will have his answer. It's a horrid thing to do, but it has got to be done. Would you rather have an ambitious daughter scheming for a throne, or a wicked flirt entangling the affections of poor young men and then casting them aside?"

Lord Caerleon's smile was troubled as he went down the stairs, and Philippa fairly shivered. She felt miserably that her hands were not clean in the matter, and this unprecedented experience handicapped her seriously as regarded the approaching interview. With the instinct of self-protection, she straightened her tie as she heard footsteps ascending the staircase, tucked away a curl that was straggling over her brow, and did her best to look absolutely unapproachable, and even rather indignant at being subjected to such an ordeal. Her blushes she could not control, however, and King Michael, never a very close observer, may be pardoned for reading in them, when he reached the roof, an encouragement to his suit.

"You have sent for me to tell me that you will share my throne, Lady Phil?" he cried, with genuine delight and admiration in his tones.

Philippa's downcast eyes were raised suddenly, and met his with an indignant flash. It was this young man's misfortune

that he could never forget his throne. "No, certainly not—just the opposite," she replied promptly.

"But you—you gave me hope." The King was angry in his turn.

"That I never did. It isn't my fault if you took it."

"But why did you ask for time?"

"I didn't. You insisted I was not to give an answer at once."

"Oh, you thought you would make a fool of me, Lady Phil?"

It was on the tip of Philippa's tongue to reply that no such process was needed, but she choked back the retort. "I warned you I should not change," she said.

"But your taking time to think gave me ground for hope, and all the considerations I have urged in your hearing the last few days could only influence you in my favour. Have you given them due thought?"

"No," said Philippa, with sudden humility, "I haven't, because it would be no good. Nothing could ever make me marry you. The truth is that I didn't refuse you definitely because I thought you would make yourself disagreeable to your mother and Uncle Cyril if I did. I haven't treated you well, and I am very sorry and very much ashamed."

"You are willing to take the responsibility of throwing me back into my old way of life, and undoing all the good that the last few months have effected in the kingdom? I suppose you know that I shall go to the bad, and that my ruin and the ruin of Thracia will be on your head?"

"I can't marry you for the sake of your kingdom."

"Then I presume that there is nothing left for me to do but to retire as gracefully as I can."

"Yes, there is something else to do," said Philippa sharply. "You ought to learn to take a disappointment like a man, not like a baby."

"Pray continue, Lady Phil. You have the right to rebuke me."

The sarcastic tone roused Philippa's anger. "I did treat you badly, and I have told you I am sorry for it," she cried. "You are very angry with me, but it never seems to strike you how selfish you have been all this time. You know that I don't care a scrap for you, but you have been trying to get me to marry you by making out that it would be for the good of your kingdom. You know that I should be miserable—perfectly miserable—but you don't mind a bit."

"On my honour as a king, I would do my best to make you happy."

"But you couldn't; how could you? You aren't the right person. Besides," Philippa rushed on hastily, "even if I cared for you I couldn't bear to be a Queen. I want to be free, to be able to go about and do as I like. It would kill me to be cooped up and never able to get away from people."

"But that is my life, always."

"Oh, you like it. You would be miserable if you hadn't people for ever hanging about and keeping an eye on you. But I have heard all about it from my father, and though I suppose one could just bear it if one loved a person very much, still—well, I don't love you, you know."

"It is a happy prospect for me, since you consider me unable to inspire love, and yet think that love alone could induce a woman to take up such a burden."

"Oh, but you might find some one who liked it, some princess who was born to that sort of thing. Besides, there's no reason why another person should not love you, though I don't."

"Pardon me, Lady Phil—my selfishness?"

"But you must cure that. Don't talk about going to the bad and ruining your kingdom because I refuse you. It's a miserable, cowardly thing to say. What has your kingdom got to do with me? It's yours, not mine, and you are

responsible for it. Besides, you can't pretend that all the interest you have taken in it lately has been for my sake. You know you find it interesting yourself. These last few months you have been a real king, looking into things and forming your own opinion about them, and your people are pleased. You couldn't go back to your old way of leaving everything to your Ministers if you wished. You are far too fond of power."

"Indeed, Lady Phil, I believe you are right." The King looked surprised, and somewhat ashamed. "After what you have said I can't very well be so selfish as to entreat you again to make yourself miserable for my sake, and I will try to feel glad that I am to be miserable instead. I may be lonely, but at least you will be happy."

"Oh, no!" cried Philippa, her eyes filling with tears. "It's too late."

"Allow me to ask you one question," said King Michael, judiciously ignoring the tears. "Do you refuse me because you care for any one else? I think I have the right to ask, for if I am so fortunate as to be without a rival, there might be some hope for me in the future."

"Oh, no!" cried Philippa again. Then, her honest heart fearing that the negative might convey a false impression, she added, in an agony of blushes, "It isn't fair—it is very unkind of you to ask, because he has never said anything, but there is some one."

"Thank you. That was all I wanted to know," said the King. He lifted Philippa's reluctant hand and kissed it, then took his leave gravely.

"Why, he is a man after all!" said Philippa to herself, as he went down the steps. She was too miserable to rise and look after him, or she would have seen him stop in crossing the court, and address Mansfield, who was driving the goldfish to distraction by throwing pebbles into the fountain. Wild horses could not have dragged Mansfield from the hotel

that morning. He had been hearing from the Chevalier of the duties and emoluments of his new post, but his interest had been so languid that the financier was half offended, and had taken his departure without giving him an invitation to accompany him to Jerusalem, as he had intended. It was a relief to Mansfield to see him go, for he had only one wish, to be left alone. Philippa was to make her decision to-day, and he must know the worst. As he sat upon the edge of the fountain, and took half-hearted shots at the gold-fish, he became aware that King Michael was approaching him, had paused beside him. To triumph over his discomfiture, of course! thought Mansfield, and refused to turn his head and look at his rival.

"Mr Mansfield," said the King, "I yield in your favour the match at billiards which we were to decide this evening. It was foolish of me to contest the point, for your success was never in doubt. Only," his tone was so significant that Mansfield glanced up in spite of himself, "let me advise you never again to throw down your cue in disgust before the end. It is not fair to—the game."

Their eyes met, and Mansfield read the meaning which underlay the words.

"You are a good fellow!" he said hastily. "I ought to have known that your mother's son couldn't be a cad."

"Allow me to thank you in my mother's name," and King Michael went on his way, lighting a cigarette with a hand which did not shake more than a very little. Mansfield watched him out of sight, then, waking as if from a dream, mounted the staircase four or five steps at a time, and presented himself suddenly before Philippa.

"I've been a regular beast, Lady Phil," he cried. "Forgive me."

Philippa raised a tear-stained face with a little start.

"Oh!" she said, "it's you!"

"You do forgive me, don't you?" persisted Mansfield.

"But what has it to do with me?" Philippa was on the defensive again.

"I thought you were going to marry the King."

"But what has that to do with you?" with the faintest suspicion of a smile about the corners of the mouth.

"It's because I love you. Oh, Phil, you know it, you have known it for a long time. It nearly drove me mad to think I had lost you."

Philippa drew herself up. "But how do you know you haven't?" she asked. "And, besides, how can you lose a thing you have never had?"

Mansfield turned pale, but recovered himself promptly. "Are you trying to torment me because you know I care for you?" he demanded.

"I think you are a little too fond of taking things for granted," said Philippa demurely, looking away from him.

"Well, there shall be no doubt about it in future," said Mansfield, seizing her hands. "Look at me and tell me whether you care for me or not. Answer me, Phil."

"Oh, you are hurting my wrists! You are unkind! I—I——"

"If you don't care for me, it can't hurt you to look at me and say so. I will let you go the moment you do."

"It's very wrong of you to tempt me to tell a story," said Philippa, with a sigh.

"By all means tell the truth, then."

"But then you won't let me go. There! I knew it."

"Then you do care? Tell the truth, Phil."

"Just a little." For one moment the blue eyes met Mansfield's, then they were hidden; but he was satisfied.

"Ugh! it is cold," cried Usk, throwing his reins to a gorgeously appparelled groom. "What a blessing to get in out of this beastly wind!"

It was the second of January, and the genial, if unseasonable, weather of the past month had been succeeded by hard frosts and biting blasts, most difficult to cope with in a summer city like Damascus. Usk and Mr Judson dismounted from their horses and entered the hotel, stamping vigorously to warm their frozen feet.

"A cup of Phil's hottest tea suggests itself as a suitable restorative," Usk went on. "After all, there are some advantages in her choosing to sit over the stove with her young man instead of facing the wintry wind. Come in, Judson. The family party is assembled, you see. What!" with an instantaneous change of tone as his eye fell upon Philippa's dark-blue habit and Mansfield's leggings, "you unblushing pair of frauds, do you mean to say that you went out, after all?"

"Oh, we had a little ride on our own account," said Philippa calmly.

"Your society is always delightful, Usk, but sometimes it is slightly wearing," said Mansfield, who had endured a good deal at the hands of his future brother-in-law during the last three days.

"Ah, you lazy beggar, I know now why you cried off going to Jerusalem with the poor old Chevalier! It's perfectly sickening to see Phil demoralising you with her attentions when she won't even give her only and frozen brother a cup of tea."

"Sit still, Phil. I will pour out the tea," said Lady Caerleon, with a loving pat on her daughter's shoulder. In Philippa's love-story her mother renewed her own youth, and in her overflowing happiness forgot to curb the little caressing ways which she had spent her married life in trying to repress as un-English.

"I wonder we haven't had a telegram from the Chevalier, or, at any rate, from Hicks," said Mansfield, jumping up to pour some more water into the teapot for Lady Caerleon.

"They both promised to let us know how the transfer of power went off."

"It's a curious thing," said Lord Caerleon; "but I met Monckton just now, and he tells me that no telegrams have come from Jerusalem to-day or yesterday, and no letters to-day. They hear that there has been a heavy snowfall in the south, and the Jerusalem trains have not arrived at Jaffa, so the post may be interrupted; but it seems queer that the city should be altogether isolated."

"I hope poor old Goldberg hasn't got snowed up on his journey," laughed Usk. "Hicks has a pretty fair idea of making himself comfortable; but the Chevalier doesn't know the ropes as he does. Besides, it must be soothing to be able to turn an honest penny out of one's misfortunes by writing a column or two about them."

"Perhaps the Roumis have refused to budge, after all," suggested Mr Judson. "They are quite capable of holding on in spite of their promises, and the provisional government have no means of making them turn out."

"That would be a deadlock, indeed," said Lord Caerleon. "We must hope——"

"Why, here's the Chevalier himself!" cried Usk, and all eyes were turned to the doorway, where the financier stood like a man in a dream, travel-stained and bent, with disordered garments.

"My dear Chevalier!" said Lord Caerleon, advancing and taking him by the arm. "Come and sit down; you are ill—frozen, perhaps."

"I am not ill, but sick at heart. Yerushalem, de holy city, de choy off de whole earth"—his voice rose into a cry of agony—"iss in de hendz off Scythia. O God——" he broke into Hebrew, "the heathen are come into Thine inheritance. . . . Oh that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence!"

"Cyril's warning!" cried Lady Caerleon.

"Yes," said the Chevalier heavily, "he warned me, but I did not see. None off us saw. We are helpless widout him. O my broder, de cheriot off Israel and de horsemen dereof! All our labour iss in fain. I hef beggared myself for dis!"

"But how did it happen?" urged Mr Judson. "How was it possible——?"

"Dey hed deir plens laid. Eferythink wass arranced beforehend. Dey knoo det widout de Count we hed no head to metch Prince Soudaroff's. Efen de Armenians—de irreconcilables—hed been squared."

"But did you escape?" cried Lord Caerleon; "or were you warned in time?"

"I heard de noose yesterday efenink. Mr Hicks and I were delayed in our chourney by de snow—we were fumink to think we hed missed de great ceremony. Den, ess we approached de City on horsebeck, we were met by Levinssohn, one off de proffissional goferment, who hed escaped, and pauced to warn me, lest de enemy should get command of de Goldberg millions by seizink me. He told us de story."

"Yes, yes, and what had happened?" cried everybody.

"De transfer off power wass made yesterday mornink in proper form, de Roumi gofernor hendink ofer to de consuls de charche off de Holy Places, and to de proffissional goferment de control off de city and de remainink troops. Dere wass great rechoicink—light and gledness, a feast and a goot day. De Letins were celebratink de feast off de Circumcision, de Greeks, busy preparink to fissit Bethlehem for deir Christmas Day, were all widin doors. It iss not known how de disturbance began. I cannot believe det my people—but dey hef bitter memories to afenche, and dey hef disappointed me griefously off late. At any rate, de Letins declare det de Chews broke in upon one off deir serfices, and insulted de worshippers. De noose spread like wildfire, de Letins poured

from all deir churches and confents, and gadered in de street before de Serai, now become de bureau off de profissionall goferment. De members were all assembled et deir deliberations. Suddenly dey found de buildink besieched, so det dey must needs berricade demselves in. De consuls, hearink de uproar, ordered de Roumi troops to clear de street and quell de disturbance, but dey hed been got at. Dey refused to mofe except under de orders off de profissionall goferment, and dose orders it wass impossible to obtain, on account off de mob riotink between. De consuls, attemptink to use deir influence, were insulted and derided. Den de Scythian consul propoced a plen. 'Dere are here,' said he, 'two thousand or more Scythian and Thracian pilgrims, who hef all done military serfice and are amenable to discipline. In a quarter off an hour I can assemble dem from de different confents where dey are quartered, and dey will ect ess police under de orders off de consular body, armed wid sticks and such oder weapons ess dey can improfice.' De consuls were doubtful, and de British consul propoced to arm de Chews instead, but de idea wass scouted. Arm de wicked blood-thirsty Chews against de mild chentle Christians—nefer! De crisis wass acute, and de consuls yielded. Den appeared a marfel. De two thousand pilgrims were dere—and a thousand more wid dem—and wonderful to relate, dere wass also de Scythian Cheneral Adrianoff, on pilgrimache, two or three colonels and machors, seferal captains, lieutenants, sub-lieutenants, all on pilgrimache—officers for an army. De pilgrims assembled, profided wid sticks by de monks. De Cheneral Adrianoff wass neturally put in command off de force. 'Shoulder arms!' and beholt, efery stick wass a rifle! Emmunition wass immediately forthcomink, and so wass a machine-gun and its kerrich. De Cheneral Adrianoff marched out to conquer. De street was quickly cleared, de Cheneral approaches to release and reassure de members off de goferment, when a tumult arices amonk his own men. De Bishop

Philaret off Tatarjé hess discofered a plot on de part off de Chews to blow up de Church off de Holy Sepulchre wid dynamite. All de Christians off efery sect and church are transported wid rache. Perish de Chews! De pilgrims dessire to tear de gofornment to pieces, de Cheneral Adrianoff places de members under arrest to save dem from dese frients off order. A new confusion! De Roumis hef been informed by de Bishop det de plot wass directed also against de Haram-es-Sherif—de holy place off all Israel from de beginnink!—and all de soldiers come runnink to put demselves under de orders off de Cheneral to fight against dose wretched Chews. In fiew off de serious state of affairs, de Cheneral does not hessitate a moment. He clears de streets, proclaims himself gofornor off de city ess representink de Emperor off Scythia, and relieves de consuls off deir functions ess guardians off de Holy Places. De British and Pannonian consuls protest; dey cannot ressisst, for anoder miracle hess heppened. Efery Greek or Scythian church and confent and larche buildink hess become a fort. Cannon are mounted on deir walls, de monks are soldiers, dere iss emmunition in plenty. To de stupefection off de consuls, de Cheneral's forces occupy efery strategical point, dey command efery corner off de city. Scythia hess been preparink de ground for many years, now she hess played her game, and won."

"But this is monstrous, unheard-of!" cried Lord Caerleon.
 "It will never be allowed to go on. England——"

"England," said the Chevalier bitterly, "will protest."

"But the rest of the Powers—Neustria, Hercynia——"

"Neustria iss led by de noce by Scythia. Hercynia hess, no doubt, receifed gretifyink assurances—her consul did not efen go through de form off protestink. Pannonia and Mag-nagrecia will be coerced or flettered into ecquiescence."

"Then you think it is useless to struggle against this outrageous usurpation?"

"We shell make representations, doubtless. But do we

wish to be deprived altogether off de Land we hef bought? We must submit to circumstances, until"—there was a cunning gleam in the Chevalier's eye—"we can alter dem. Det will be de task off de remainder off my life—to return de poisson of dese reptiles upon deir own head. I tell you"—he turned fiercely upon Mr Judson, who had made a deprecating gesture—"I would conclude an alliance wid de Enemy off menkind himself to get dis wronk redressed!"

"Oh, Chevalier!" cried Lady Caerleon, "be patient. Can you not wait upon God a little longer? Think how wonderfully He has furthered your plans during the last few years—how the way of the Kings of the East has been prepared in spite of what seemed insuperable obstacles."

"Kinks off de East!" cried the Chevalier. "A month ago we were de kinks off de worrlt! Shell we rest contented wid a goferment sittink at Hebron or Nablûs, regulatink metters off commerce and land, when de Holy City iss in de hends of idolaters, persecutors, creepink things, and de sons off de apostate are gadered togeder to mock at us?"

"You are misjudging me, Chevalier," remonstrated Mr Judson, against whom the last sentence had been directed. "I feel the wrong done as deeply as you do, although the study of prophecy had warned me that some blow of the kind might be expected."

"At least leafe us our prophecies!" cried the Chevalier. "May we not interpret dem in our own way, or must de renegades steal dem also?"

"We have no wish to rob you of them; but you must not try to exclude us Hebrew Christians from the heritage of Israel. Yours are the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the promises; but they are ours, too. Don't refuse our help. I think you have no idea of the deep interest taken in the Jewish question in Evangelical circles in England. Give us leave to do what we can to arouse these English friends of Zion, and stimulate them to action.

Believe me, when the facts are fully known, there will be such a strong feeling throughout the country, with regard to the action of Scythia, that the Government will be forced to insist on her withdrawing from Jerusalem."

"Accept help from de apostate? Nefer, son off a traitor! I will unite wid Christians, wid agnostics, wid Reformed Chews, wid de Adfersary himself, in de cause off Zion, but not wid you. You hef no part in de congregation off Israel."

"Come, Chevalier," said Lady Caerleon, laying her hand on his clenched fist, as he shook it furiously at Mr Judson, "you are over-excited. Rest a little, and have a cup of tea," she motioned the young people away, "and then we will talk things over quietly, and see what can be done."

"Have you thought what all this will mean to Uncle Cyril?" asked Philippa of Mansfield, as they left the room together. He nodded gravely.

"I know. He came into my mind first thing. It's awful."

"To see all his work undone, and to know that he can't put it right!" wailed Philippa, breaking down suddenly. "I think his heart will break, or—or——" the more terrible fear remained unuttered.

"Do you know," said Mansfield diffidently, "I don't think it will break him altogether. It might have done once, but he has some one else to think of now. He will have his wife to comfort and take care of, and that helps a man, Phil."

"It is very good for strength, To know that some one needs you to be strong," reflected Philippa. "Oh, dear!" she cried, with a watery smile, "I'm quoting poetry again, just as Uncle Cyril told me not to."

It is possible that Philippa's anxiety might have been somewhat relieved if she could have read a confidential

letter from Queen Ernestine to her mother, written some months later :—

“This answer to your loving letter, my dear sister, is for your own eyes alone. It seems to me (I hope I am mistaken, and that I detect a criticism where none was intended) that I can read between the lines something that is not exactly a distrust of my husband, but a fear lest his terrible trials may have rendered him less regardful of me. In no case but yours would I condescend to notice such a suspicion ; but I like to think of you, the wife of Cyril’s beloved brother, as a dear sister of my own, and I cannot bear that you should be in any doubt as to my happiness. When my beloved’s trial came upon him, I said to him (I am almost ashamed now to write it) that he must be content, instead of ruling the world, to make one woman happy, and this is what he does. Do you realise what that means ? He bends all his powers, his whole mind, to please a woman whose life has been so desolate that for years it seemed the height of bliss, unattainable bliss, to be near him, to belong to him. Do you wonder my joy is so great that I look upon it with trembling ? That such a man should devote himself to ensure the happiness of one whose only claim is that she loves him—it is wonderful ! How can you say that I have given up everything for him ? I have done nothing—nothing. You would do far more for your Carlino ; why should you think it strange in me ?

“Besides, my sister, I have given up nothing that I care for. Court life has had no attractions for me since I left girlhood behind, at seventeen, and although Michael was quite willing—even desirous—that I should return to Thracia, I can see that it is better not. It is characteristic of him to wish to go his own way, and earn his own experience, and a mother’s anxieties and counsel would quickly become irksome to him. There is nothing to regret there, you

see. I was cradled in romanticism (alas! my education and my fate were sadly incongruous), and now at last I am happy. I have the society of the man I love and of a few faithful friends, the affectionate loyalty of these poor Arabs, and freedom from the cares of civilisation and state. The Arabs, indeed, have transferred their allegiance from myself to Cyril, and I rejoice in the change. We are both studying their language, for I am anxious to be able to do something to raise the condition of the women and girls, but he has no need of anything to bring him into close touch with the men. Under his direction they are beginning to build themselves more permanent houses instead of their wretched huts, as well as to repair the ruined walls of the fortress in case of need. He is interested also in improving their system of irrigation, so as to utilise much of the water that is at present wasted, and says that he is a candidate for the honour of making two bunches of dates grow where only one grew before.

"Nor are we shut off altogether from the old life. You may have heard that we sent poor Stefanovics (who found the desert insupportable) and his wife back to Brutli, to serve as a means of communication with our friends in the world, and superintend our arrangements for visitors, and they do their work admirably. That good, droll Mr Hicks paid us a visit before returning to America, and the Chevalier Goldberg intends to brave the terrors of the desert before long. Our last visitor was dear Fred Mansfield, whose affection for my husband brings the tears to my eyes. I can see, however (is not this candid of me?), that he has improved immensely since he has found himself in a more responsible position. He has gained enormously in readiness and the habit of command since he was removed from the shadow of Cyril's personality. His open-air life suits him, and he has earned golden opinions from the Chevalier and his confidential agent. Please let Phil hear this. Fred tells us that he

hopes to visit England and bring her back with him next year, and he showed us the plans for his house. How I shall delight to see her again!

"You hint at our visiting Europe. I am foolishly nervous, I dare say, but I cannot feel that Cyril is safe anywhere outside the desert. I have visions of treachery on the part of the Powers if they knew he was within their reach. Still, if he wishes to make the attempt, he will hear nothing against his plan from me, even should he decide to visit Thracia *incognito*, as Michael has suggested. At present we are planning a trip to Palmyra, which, with the help of the Arabs, we hope to accomplish without difficulty, posing as English tourists—not for the first time in our lives, you will remember. The opportunity will be valuable, in allowing my husband to make acquaintance with the sheikhs of other tribes than ours, who have shown a strong disposition to invite him to become their head.

"It is a curious thing that the Arabs refuse to believe in Cyril's illness for a moment. According to them, he has been treated with dire ingratitude by the Jews, and to mark his displeasure has retired into the desert, whence he will emerge at the head of an Arab host on the occasion of some great crisis, and carry all before him. Oh that this might indeed be the case! Day by day, as I pray for it, I vow upon my knees that should he ever regain his old powers I will be no hindrance to his schemes. These few months have had more happiness crowded into them than I could ever have anticipated, and I will show that I also can be unselfish. But alas! there is no hope. One terrible day—I have told this to no one on earth but yourself—when the news of the Scythian seizure of Jerusalem arrived, I thought he would have gone out of his mind. He walked up and down the room for a long time, muttering and moving his hands as if he was addressing an assembly, then he turned suddenly to me, looking like his old self. 'Paper, Ernest-

ine!' he cried. 'They thought I was done for, did they?' I gave him the paper, he sat down, burning with eagerness, and made a few marks upon the first sheet—a kind of plan. Then he began to dig the pen into the paper, and at last threw it down in despair. 'It's all gone, Ernestine, but for a moment I saw the whole thing.' He called Paschies, and told him to write and advise the Chevalier to make the best terms he could for a Jewish Legislature sitting at Nablûs, and since then he has never once alluded, at least in my hearing, to the affairs of Palestine. It is unspeakably sad. At ordinary times he appears perfectly contented, rides with me, hunts with Banics and the Arabs, plans improvements for the place, reads aloud to us in the evenings, but when the mail comes in——! Ah, my dear sister, pray that you may never know such sorrow as I endure then. He reads of all that is going on—without him: he sees that he is forgotten where he was once supreme. He goes up to the ruined colonnade, at the summit of the palace, and spends hours there alone. Once I crept up after him; he was gazing out over the desert as Napoleon looked out upon the sea from the cliffs of St Helena. He does not know I saw him, for I dared not disturb his mournful reverie. I am only too well aware that I cannot comfort him, and he would not wish me to behold him in his desolation. I can but pray for him, and pretend to notice nothing when he returns, full of kindness, and apologises for his long absence. He has been reading his letters, he says. On the subject of politics we never open our lips to one another.—Believe me to be, my dear Nadia, your loving sister,

ERNESTINE."

THE END.

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